

# **The Development of Environmental Politics in Inter-War and Post-War Britain**

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## **Abstract**

Beginning in the inter-war years and ending in the early 1970s, this thesis explains how and why the ‘environment’ came to play a significant role in mainstream British politics. During this period, a range of rural and urban problems became conceptualised as ‘environmental’, and governments came to understand their responsibilities not simply in terms of providing basic standards of public health, but also in terms of improving the broader ‘quality of life’ of all citizens.

Chapter two explores rural preservation in the inter-war period, and the passage of town and country planning and National Parks legislation in the 1940s. Chapter three examines air pollution, focusing on the London smog of 1952 and the passage of the 1956 Clean Air Act. Chapter four explores Britain’s early nuclear power programme, and shifting attitudes towards modernisation, risk and the countryside in the 1950s and 1960s. Chapter five examines the growth of political interest in ‘environmental’ problems during the 1960s, and the eventual formation of the Department of the Environment in 1970. Finally, chapter six focuses upon the challenge of traffic in towns, exploring proposals for the construction of a motorway network in London in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The thesis concludes that the ‘environment’ was established as a field of public policy by the early 1970s. Whereas many existing accounts have emphasised the importance of radical critiques of human interaction with the environment, it is the contention of this thesis that environmental politics in Britain developed in the political mainstream, taking shape amid efforts to address new challenges of governance. The rejection of modernity, in the form of industrialisation, urban life, consumer culture and economic growth, was never more than a minority position within British politics, and successful arguments for environmental protection had to be framed in line with dominant social and economic priorities.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

AA	Automobile Association
BMAG	Blackheath Motorway Action Group
BRF	British Roads Federation
CEGB	Central Electricity Generating Board
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CPRE	Council for the Preservation of Rural England
DOE	Department of the Environment
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FOE	Friends of the Earth
GLC	Greater London Council
GLDP	Greater London Development Plan
IMCO	Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation
LMAG	London Motorway Action Group
MHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MOH	Ministry of Health
NFU	National Farmers' Union
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSAS	National Smoke Abatement Society
RAC	Royal Automobile Club
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
UKAEA	United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
UN	United Nations
YHA	Youth Hostels Association

## Chapter One

### Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the ‘environment’ is a well-established sphere of public policy. British governments and political parties may vary in the extent to which they emphasise their ‘green’ credentials, and the adequacy and sincerity of their proposals may certainly be contested, but the need to pay lip service to the environment is an undoubted feature of contemporary policy-making. The environment’s political position is underlined by the existence of a large number of environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which, taken together, comprise a significant number of members and supporters. While figures vary, and there is undoubtedly overlap between the memberships of different groups, one estimate has placed the combined number of supporters of environmental organisations in the UK at seven million, a figure that allows for the claim that the ‘environmental movement’ is the second largest mass movement in British history after trade unionism.<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the inter-war years and ending in the early 1970s, this thesis explains how and why the ‘environment’ came to play a significant role in mainstream British politics. Phil Macnaghten and John Urry write that before the ‘environment’ could be viewed as an area of political concern, a range of different problems had to come to be regarded as part of ‘the environment’.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in their comparative study of northern Europe and Scandinavia, Andrew Jamison et al note that, in order for the environmental movement and environmental politics to gather pace, ‘the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas Crowson and Jean-François Mouhot, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2013), p. 47; Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, *Contested Natures* (London, 1998), p. 60

<sup>2</sup> Macnaghten and Urry, *Contested Natures*, p. 21

environment had first to be constituted as a meaningful area for ... political praxis'.<sup>3</sup> This thesis argues that this process took place in Britain during the inter-war and post-war periods, as a range of rural and urban problems of governance became conceptualised as 'environmental'. It demonstrates how, through the preservation of the countryside, the control of pollution, and efforts to deal with traffic congestion in towns and cities, the state expanded its authority over the environment, while parties on both the left and right increasingly incorporated environmental issues into their political programmes. In part, this process occurred in response to perceived public demand as, in the political context of the welfare state, and in the wider social climate of post-war affluence, governments came to understand their responsibilities not simply in terms of providing basic standards of material security and public health, but also in terms of improving the broader 'quality of life' of all citizens.

It is important from the outset to define what is meant by the term 'environmental politics'. The Oxford English Dictionary gives a number of definitions for 'environment', and two in particular provide a basis for exploring the historical particularities of the rise of 'environmental politics' in Britain. Put simply, 'environment' may refer to 'the area surrounding a place or thing'; in slightly more complex terms, it can mean 'the natural world or physical surroundings in general, either as a whole or within a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity'. It is therefore a matter of surroundings, and for the purpose of politics it relates to the human impact on those surroundings. The existing literature varies on whether 'environment' should be seen only to comprise the 'natural' environment, with the built environment excluded, but it is the argument of this thesis that 'environmental politics' in Britain developed in response to both rural and

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jamison, Ron Eyerman and Jacqueline Cramer, *The Making of the New Environmental Consciousness: A Comparative Study of the Environmental Movements in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 4-5



urban problems, and as such it is vital to include the built environment. Therefore, throughout this thesis, ‘environmental politics’ will be used to refer to *the debate over the impact of human society on the ‘natural’ and built environment, and the attempt to manage that impact through public policy*. For much of the period under consideration, the word ‘environment’ was not in common use among political actors, and when it was used it did not necessarily carry the same meaning that it carries in the present day. It is therefore one of the aims of this thesis to trace its growth in use and shift in meaning over time.

### **An ‘environmental revolution’?**

In much of the existing literature, the development of environmental politics is seen to have occurred from the 1960s onwards. For numerous authors, it was at that time that a large-scale environmental movement emerged, bringing with it a significant challenge to dominant modes of thought concerning the interaction between human societies and their surroundings. John McCormick argues that an ‘environmental revolution’ occurred between 1962 and 1970, and this is a claim made frequently in the existing literature.<sup>4</sup> In a recent global study of the subject, the German historian Joachim Radkau writes of an ‘ecological revolution of 1970’, and goes so far as to describe the growth of the environmental movement as ‘the symbol of a whole era’, representative of a ‘New Enlightenment’.<sup>5</sup> For those that characterise the events of the 1960s and 1970s in this way, the emergence of the environmental movement represents a backlash against the technological, growth-centred focus of the immediate post-war years. Jamison argues that, ‘like women’s liberation, rock music and the internet’, the environmental movement was ‘a product of the 1960s’ and ‘the spirit of the times-a-changing’, which emerged as ‘part of the counter-cultural

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<sup>4</sup> John McCormick, *The Global Environmental Movement* (2nd ed. London, 1992), p. 47

<sup>5</sup> Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 1, 10, 111

critique of the “technocratic society” and the widespread questioning of the dominant values of the consumer culture’.<sup>6</sup>

These authors attribute this development in part to the environmental events of the 1960s. Growing signs of ecological destruction are viewed as making a contribution, while the publication in 1962 of *Silent Spring*, the bestselling book by the American marine biologist Rachel Carson that highlighted the impact of pesticide use on bird populations, is frequently cited as the crucial event in the growth of the environmental movement. Kirkpatrick Sale writes that *Silent Spring* marked the beginning of the ‘environmental revolution’, and likens its impact to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on the anti-slavery movement, while David Peterson del Mar claims that the book ‘ignited the green fire of environmentalism’.<sup>7</sup> Alongside a new awareness of environmental problems, many authors attribute the growth of the environmental movement to a wider shift in values in Western societies, based on the sociologist Ronald Inglehart’s theory of postmaterialism. Inglehart argues that, with the rise of mass affluence in Western societies in the post-war period, the ‘basic values and goals’ of the public gradually shifted ‘from giving top priority to economic growth and consumption, to placing increasing emphasis on the quality of life’. Inglehart identifies the growth of the environmental movement as evidence for postmaterialism, arguing that one result of the shift in values ‘has been a rise in environmental consciousness and a higher priority for environmental protection’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jamison, *The Making of Green Knowledge: Environmental Politics and Cultural Transformation* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 16

<sup>7</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement 1962-1992* (New York, 1993), pp. 3-4; David Peterson del Mar, *Environmentalism* (Harlow, 2006), p. 102

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Inglehart, ‘Public support for environmental protection: objective problems and subjective values in 43 societies’, *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1995), pp. 61-2

Inglehart's theory has been used to support the idea that the emergence of an environmental movement represents a backlash against economic growth and consumerism. Stephen Cotgrove argues that the late 1960s were a 'turning point in the triumphant march of science and technology in the esteem of the Western world', and suggests that by the 1970s a postmaterialist 'alternative environmental paradigm' had emerged that stood in direct opposition to the 'dominant paradigm' of industrialism and market economics. The new paradigm emphasised the likelihood of environmental catastrophe, and rejected the idea that there could be a 'technological fix' to ecological problems. Instead, catastrophe 'could be avoided only by fundamental and radical changes in the values and institutions of industrial societies'.<sup>9</sup> Andrew Dobson has taken the notion of the alternative environmental paradigm further, arguing that it should be considered to represent a new political ideology. Dobson distinguishes between 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism', suggesting that they are separated by their conception of the ideal relationship between humans and the environment. Whereas environmentalists take an 'anthropocentric' view, believing that humans should care for the environment because it is in their own interests to do so, ecologism takes an 'ecocentric' perspective, beginning with the premise that the environment has intrinsic value, and should not be subordinate to human interests. Whereas the reforms proposed by environmentalists may be achievable within the existing framework of capitalist society, ecologism 'seeks radically to call into question a whole series of political, economic and social practices in a way that environmentalism does not', envisaging 'a post-industrial future quite distinct from that with which we are most generally acquainted'.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Cotgrove, *Catastrophe or Cornucopia: The Environment, Politics and the Future* (Chichester, 1982), pp. 3, 27-28, 63

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (4th ed. London, 2007), pp. 15, 103, 189

The focus on an ‘environmental revolution’ from the 1960s onwards presents a number of problems. Most obviously, by discussing a ‘revolution’ there is a risk of exaggerating the extent of the changes that have occurred. While the emergence of the environment as a political issue is the starting point for this thesis, it is important to retain scepticism as to the degree to which the environment has occupied the minds both of political actors and of members of the general public. Similarly, much of the existing literature overemphasises the significance of radical forms of environmental thought, exemplified by Cotgrove’s discussion of an alternative environmental paradigm and Dobson’s suggestion that ecologism represents a distinct political ideology. While both authors acknowledge the existence of more moderate forms of environmentalism, there is an implication in their work that radical ideas have the potential to transform Western societies. Cotgrove wrote his book in 1982, and Dobson published the first edition of his in 1990, when perhaps it seemed as though radical environmental thought would grow in influence, but from our present vantage point it would be difficult to argue that this has been borne out in political reality. Inglehart’s postmaterialism thesis must also be evaluated in this light. While it may be useful for explaining changing priorities among affluent Western publics, it is difficult to discern a value shift that has dethroned the principle of economic growth.

Additionally, a post-1960s explanation poses problems of causation. Luke Martell, who is himself a sociologist, argues that postmaterialist explanations for the growth of environmentalism can be ‘too sociological’, focusing on structural factors while excluding ‘problems identified in the content of its discourse from having a bearing on the explanation of its rise’.<sup>11</sup> While the existing literature does point to environmental events that occurred during this period, there is a tendency to simply

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<sup>11</sup> Luke Martell, *Ecology and Society: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1994), p. 131

offer 'the sixties' as an explanation, and to emphasise the importance of one book, *Silent Spring*, in triggering the growth of what is presented as a global phenomenon. There is a clear need to step back from sociological arguments about value change, and examine more closely the context in which environmental politics took shape, taking account of the role of events and the decisions of political actors. A key challenge to the postmaterialism thesis originates in the work of Ramachandra Guha and Joan Martinez Alier, whose identification of an 'environmentalism of the poor' in the developing world conflicts with the notion that environmentalism is a phenomenon particular to advanced industrial societies where postmaterialist values are widespread.<sup>12</sup> Inglehart himself has attempted to account for this through the development of an 'objective problems, subjective values' explanation, suggesting that while environmental degradation accounts for the emergence of environmentalism in developing nations, its emergence in the West, where ecological problems are often far less severe, can still be explained in terms of postmaterialism.<sup>13</sup> This explanation has been the subject of significant debate among sociologists, with critics of the postmaterialist thesis remaining unconvinced. Through his analysis of global survey data on environmental attitudes, Steven R. Brechin has shown that an 'objective problems plus subjective values explanation fails to describe adequately the bases of southern and northern environmental concern', and he stresses that 'environmentalism is most likely a complex social phenomenon, a mixture of social perceptions, local histories and environmental realities, international relationships and influences, and unique cultural and structural features'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Riley E. Dunlap and Richard York point out that reliance on the

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<sup>12</sup> Ramachandra Guha, *Environmentalism: A Global History* (New York, 2000), pp. 99-100

<sup>13</sup> Inglehart, 'Objective problems and subjective values', p. 57

<sup>14</sup> Steven R. Brechin, 'Objective problems, subjective values, and global environmentalism: evaluating the postmaterialist argument and challenging a new explanation', *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 80, no. 4 (December, 1999), pp. 793, 807

postmaterialist thesis misses the fact that environmental concern has materialist and non-materialist dimensions in all nations.<sup>15</sup>

It is necessary, too, to question the importance attached to the emergence of an 'environmental movement'. In the social sciences, environmental groups have been cited as evidence for the rise of 'new social movements', with an emphasis on a shift to postmaterialist values and the growth of radical critiques of Western societies.<sup>16</sup> As has been noted, the environmental movement has been presented as second only to trade unionism in the history of mass movements in Britain, yet in order for it to be considered on such a scale its numbers must include not only supporters of 'radical' organisations such as Friends of the Earth (FOE) and Greenpeace, but also longstanding 'moderate' organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the National Trust. During the 1970s, new, more radical organisations gained significant numbers of supporters (FOE grew from 1,000 members in 1971 to 18,000 in 1981), but this was dwarfed by the growth of moderate groups. The RSPB grew from 98,000 members in 1971 to 441,000 in 1981, while the National Trust expanded from 159,000 members in 1967 to 950,000 in 1980.<sup>17</sup> If the growth in membership of environmental organisations is to be viewed as evidence for a revolution, bird enthusiasts and visitors to National Trust properties must arguably be seen as part of the vanguard.

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<sup>15</sup> Riley E. Dunlap and Richard York, 'The globalization of environmental concern and the limits of the postmaterialist values explanation: evidence from four multinational surveys', *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2008), p. 536

<sup>16</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1999), p. 25

<sup>17</sup> Christopher Rootes, 'Nature protection organisations in Britain', Centre for the Study of Social and Political Movements, Working Paper 1/2007 (Canterbury, 2007), p. 9; Philip W. Sutton, *Explaining Environmentalism: In Search of a New Social Movement* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 123

### Long-term history

Alongside the presentation of environmental politics as a post-1960s phenomenon, there have been many studies that have emphasised the longer-term roots of environmental concern. The work of Keith Thomas has shown that a shift in attitudes took place in the early modern period, during which time ‘some long-established dogmas about man’s place in nature were discarded’ and ‘the relationship of man to other species was redefined’. Thomas argues that, whereas the Judeo-Christian worldview had previously informed an emphasis on human domination over a hostile and unforgiving nature, by the end of the eighteenth century perceptions had shifted to stress the vulnerability of the natural world and man’s responsibility as a custodian.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the literature on environmentalism and environmental politics, a link is made between industrialisation and the growth of concern for the natural world. In the 1930s G.M. Trevelyan, who was himself actively involved in campaigning for the preservation of the English countryside, stated that the ‘love of nature in its most natural and unadulterated form has grown *pari passu* with the Industrial Revolution’. Trevelyan argued that the extent of public interest reflected the scale of the damage inflicted upon nature by industrial processes, writing that ‘no doubt it is partly because the destruction is so rapid that the appreciation is so loud’.<sup>19</sup>

Trevelyan’s perspective has been reflected in later treatments of the subject. Russell J. Dalton, for example, notes that environmental concern increased in the nineteenth century as ‘the environmental consequences of the Industrial Revolution were becoming manifest’, while Philip W. Sutton argues that ‘organised environmentalism

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<sup>18</sup> Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 15

<sup>19</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, ‘The call and claims of natural beauty’, in *An Autobiography and Other Essays* (London, 1949), pp. 92, 101

emerged around the point at which the process of industrialisation began to be sensed as irreversible, and the experience of living in an industrial society became widespread'.<sup>20</sup> The formation of a number of 'environmental' organisations during this period is regularly cited as evidence of this development. The Commons, Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society, described by McCormick as 'the world's first environmental interest group', was founded in Britain in 1865, and was followed by a range of organisations concerned with the preservation of the countryside and the protection of wildlife.<sup>21</sup> Philip Lowe suggests that the Victorian interest in natural history contributed to the rise of animal protection as a cause, and points to the formation of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1840) and the RSPB (1891) as signs of growing public interest.<sup>22</sup> In terms of landscape preservation, one of the most significant events was the foundation of the National Trust in 1895, which was followed in the early twentieth century by the formation of the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves in 1912 and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) in 1926.<sup>23</sup>

For a significant number of authors, such nineteenth-century developments provide evidence of a backlash against industrialisation and economic growth. Philip Lowe and Jane Goyder argue that the late Victorian period saw 'a reversal of the rationalist, progressivist outlook deriving from the Enlightenment', and a 'growing equivocallness towards industrialisation itself'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Anna Bramwell dates the beginning of the development of radical ecologism to the 1880s, and writes that it

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<sup>20</sup> Russell J. Dalton, *The Green Rainbow: Environmental Groups in Western Europe* (London, 1994), pp. 26-27; Sutton, *Explaining Environmentalism*, p. 176

<sup>21</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. viii

<sup>22</sup> Philip Lowe, 'Values and institutions in the history of British nature conservation', in Andrew Warren and F.B. Goldsmith (eds.), *Conservation in Perspective* (London, 1983), pp. 330-32

<sup>23</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. 6

<sup>24</sup> Philip Lowe and Jane Goyder, *Environmental Groups in Politics* (London, 1983), p. 19



emerged from increasing ‘disillusionment with Western progress’.<sup>25</sup> Peter C. Gould makes use of Cotgrove’s notion of the ‘alternative environmental paradigm’ to state that ‘the most fecund and important period of green politics before 1980 lay between 1880 and 1900’. Pointing to ideas of ‘back to the land’ and ‘back to nature’, and the work of socialist thinkers such as John Ruskin and William Morris, Gould argues that in late-nineteenth century Britain ‘the philosophy of industrialism ... received an extraordinary degree of critical examination’.<sup>26</sup> Such arguments have been heavily influenced by the work of Martin J. Wiener, who writes that the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw the English ‘articulate classes’ develop an ‘ambiguous attitude toward modern industrial society’, and acquire values ‘resistant to economic innovation and growth’. Wiener’s central concern is with the economic impact of ‘anti-industrial’ values, and their supposed contribution to British ‘decline’ in the twentieth century, but the trends he identifies also have implications for the emergence of environmental politics. In Wiener’s view, from the late-nineteenth century the English middle classes retreated behind ‘the rustic and nostalgic myth of an “English way of life”’ and attention turned not to further industrial innovation, but to ‘taming and civilising the dangerous engines of progress’. While one outcome of this process was ‘persistent economic retardation’, Wiener argues that it also led to the emergence of environmental practices, such as nature conservation, that ‘served to humanise urban industrial society’.<sup>27</sup>

There is a line through from the identification of an anti-industrial outlook in late-nineteenth century Britain to the emphasis on environmental politics as a radical,

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<sup>25</sup> Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (London, 1989), p. 13; Anna Bramwell, *The Fading of the Greens: The Decline of Environmental Politics in the West* (London, 1994), p. 28

<sup>26</sup> Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land and Socialism in Great Britain, 1880-1900* (Brighton, 1988), pp. vii, 15-16

<sup>27</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (2nd ed. Cambridge, 2004), pp. ix, xv-xvi, 6, 9-10, 154

post-1960s phenomenon. Meredith Veldman makes a connection between the development in the 1960s and 1970s of what she terms the ‘green movement’, and the emergence both of new forms of English fantasy literature (exemplified by the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis) and of the anti-nuclear protest movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In Veldman’s view, those three developments are linked by a Romantic worldview defined by ‘the belief that the empirical and analytical methods of modern science cannot comprehend all of reality’. Emerging ‘in the late eighteenth century as a reaction against the new society taking shape under the impact of empiricism and industrialisation’, Romanticism endured in the twentieth century among those for whom ‘the gains of affluence could not outweigh the losses resulting from bureaucratisation [and] the “massness” of modern society’.<sup>28</sup> Veldman points to Wiener’s notion of an English ‘anti-industrial’ spirit and argues that by the 1960s it gave rise to a green movement that demanded ‘political and economic decentralisation, a no-growth or steady-state economy, environmental preservation, alternative technologies, and the conservation of energy resources’. The movement represented a reaction against ‘the technological optimism of the 1950s and early 1960s’, as ‘large numbers of people’, predominantly drawn from the middle classes, ‘began to realise that the wonders of science and technology could be viewed as unparalleled horrors, particularly in the environmental context’. Such horrors included pesticide use (as documented by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring*), air and water pollution, and radioactive fall-out from nuclear weapons testing.<sup>29</sup> A Romantic strand of environmental thought has also been identified by Frank Trentmann, who argues that sections of the inter-war outdoor movement displayed a ‘neo-

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<sup>28</sup> Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 3, 304

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 244

Romanticism', inspired by the socialism of Ruskin and Morris and characterised by a commitment to a 'comprehensive break with modern urban-commercial society'.<sup>30</sup>

### **Modernity, planning and 'consensus'**

It is a key contention of this thesis that radical forms of protest, rooted in anti-industrialism and a suspicion of technology and economic growth, did not play a central role in the development of environmental politics in Britain. In this respect, the thesis is informed by the work of those that have critiqued the 'declinist' perspective. While Wiener argues that English culture was marked by 'a suspicion of material and technological development', and asserts that the nation's fortunes were shaped by an 'anti-industrial' spirit which 'permeated English life', the existence of such a spirit and the extent of Britain's supposed twentieth-century economic decline have received extensive historiographical scrutiny.<sup>31</sup> A common criticism of Wiener's thesis is that it ignores the fact that anti-industrialism has formed part of the national culture of other industrial powers, such as Germany and the United States, whose economies are seen to have outperformed Britain's during the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> W.D. Rubinstein points out that every national culture contains strands that are anti-capitalist and anti-business, and argues that 'British culture has been markedly less strident in its condemnation of capitalism than virtually any other Western culture'.<sup>33</sup> Rubinstein notes that British culture contained an 'arguably more significant tradition which emphasised rationality and science as the primary desiderata of evolving society', and points both to 'the extraordinary British contribution to science over the

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<sup>30</sup> Frank Trentmann, 'Civilisation and its discontents: English neo-romanticism and the transformation of anti-modernism in twentieth-century Western culture', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1994), p. 584

<sup>31</sup> Wiener, *English Culture*, pp. 5, 81

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Gamble, 'Theories and explanations of British decline', in Richard English and Michael Kenny (eds.), *Rethinking British Decline* (London, 2000), p. 11

<sup>33</sup> W.D. Rubinstein, 'Cultural explanations for Britain's economic decline: how true?', in Bruce Collins and Keith Robbins (eds.), *British Culture and Economic Decline* (London, 1990), p. 78

past 300 years', and to 'a popular culture which was always surprisingly friendly to science'.<sup>34</sup> He concludes that Britain's 'cultural base is founded not in anti-rational, anti-modern 'gentry' values but, on the contrary, on a value system and thought patterns which emphasise positivism and rationality to a remarkable degree'.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to pointing out the flaws in Wiener's characterisation of English culture, critics have also noted that the focus on 'decline' misrepresents economic reality. As Guy Ortolano writes, the 'declinist' perspective served an ideological purpose during the post-war decades, allowing proponents to condemn the nation's supposed economic backwardness, lament 'the supposedly marginalised status of science, technology and expertise', and argue for political programmes of modernisation, but such claims lack a clear evidential basis.<sup>36</sup> David Edgerton suggests that the 'anti-industrial' or 'anti-scientific' spirit of the elites has become a cliché, used to portray Britain as becoming less technological over time, when in fact the opposite has been true. Edgerton notes that 'the most obvious feature of British science, technology and industry since 1870 is its expansion, rather than its contraction', and points out that while Britain experienced *relative* economic decline during the twentieth century when compared with the growth rates of, for example, the United States, Germany, France or Japan, it did not suffer *absolute* decline. The British economy did grow more slowly than the global economy, but it nevertheless continued to grow by a few percentage points each year, except for during brief periods of economic slump.<sup>37</sup> On the subject of Britain's supposed weakness in technological innovation during the twentieth century, Jim Tomlinson writes that it is 'simply untrue' to suggest that

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 79; W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline in Britain, 1750-1990* (London, 1993), pp. 94, 97

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 101

<sup>36</sup> Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 10, 15, 167

<sup>37</sup> David Edgerton, *Science, Technology and the British Industrial 'Decline' 1870-1970* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1, 3-4

‘engineers and scientists were a small minority excluded from power and influence’, and convincing evidence for British engineering prowess is provided by Edgerton in his study of the military and civil aviation industries in the inter-war and post-war years.<sup>38</sup> Edgerton suggests that the historiographical focus on the creation of the welfare state has led to the misconception that Britain was ‘neither a warfare state, nor ... a “developmental state” devoted to industrial modernisation’, and demonstrates, through close analysis of aircraft research and development, that it was in fact a ‘technological and militant nation’, in which the state was ‘committed to scientific, technological and industrial modernisation’.<sup>39</sup>

Further questioning of the existence of an ‘anti-industrial’ spirit comes from Peter Mandler, who argues that the trend in twentieth century Britain was away from, rather than towards rural nostalgia, and questions the validity of Wiener’s thesis for explaining the growth of interest in the conservation of the nation’s built and natural heritage. He warns against creating a ‘Whiggish’ history of the ‘preservation’ movement, which begins with the assumption that its ideas have prevailed in the present, and thus seeks signs of its success in earlier periods.<sup>40</sup> Mandler suggests that such a history risks missing the fact that opponents of industrial society comprised a small, embattled minority of the elite, and ignoring the extent to which the British people displayed enthusiasm for science, technology and consumer culture. Pointing to the inter-war period, he argues that anti-industrialists pitted themselves ‘against nearly the whole of the electorate’, with the majority of the population wishing to

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<sup>38</sup> Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2000), p. 25

<sup>39</sup> David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (2nd ed. London, 2013), pp. 132-33, 171

<sup>40</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Against “Englishness”: English culture and the limits to rural nostalgia, 1850-1940’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 7 (December, 1997), pp. 159-60; Peter Mandler, ‘Rethinking the “Powers of Darkness”: an anti-history of the preservation movement in Britain’, in Melanie Hall (ed.), *Towards World Heritage: International Origins of the Preservation Movement 1870-1930* (Farnham, 2011), p. 221

enjoy the advantages of economic growth.<sup>41</sup> This was reflected in government policy, which remained 'populist' and 'pro-growth', and certainly did not seek to inhibit industrial development.<sup>42</sup>

The development of environmental politics in Britain took place not in a context of anti-industrialism and suspicion towards science and technology, but rather in a social and political context in which modernisation and economic growth were widely considered to be key priorities. A Romantic rejection of industrialisation was not the driving force behind environmental debate and policy proposals. On the contrary, such discussion was characterised by a desire to reconcile the twin aims of economic development and the provision of a clean and amenable environment. With this in mind, it is worth considering the work of Michael Bess on environmental politics in France. Bess uses the term 'the light-green society' to describe the impact of environmental thought and activism on present-day France, arguing that French society in the post-war era became 'caught between the lure of technology, progress, and abundance on the one hand, and, on the other, the gnawing fear of losing contact with the natural world, of drifting insensibly out of touch with its most cherished heritage and traditions'.<sup>43</sup> Setting the growth of environmentalism in the context of post-war economic development, Bess writes that a wave of 'technological enthusiasm', exemplified by grand projects like Concorde and nuclear power, was tempered by the desire for 'a safe, clean, verdant environment in which to enjoy' the fruits of modernisation.<sup>44</sup> 'One cannot understand the impact of environmentalism in France,' Bess argues, 'unless one takes

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<sup>41</sup> Mandler, 'Powers of Darkness', pp. 227, 224, 237-38

<sup>42</sup> Mandler, 'Against "Englishness"', p. 174

<sup>43</sup> Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000* (Chicago, 2003), p. 4

<sup>44</sup> Bess's use of the term 'technological enthusiasm' is inspired by the work of Thomas Hughes on technological innovation in the United States. See Thomas Hughes, *American Genesis: A Century of Innovation and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (New York, 1989), esp. chapter 1

this ambivalence towards technological modernity as one's basic starting point.<sup>45</sup> Out of this ambivalence, concludes Bess, there arose an unintended compromise, a 'half-revolution' in French environmental consciousness:

The greening of France ran shallow and wide. It ran wide, in the sense that practically every facet of French society eventually came to acquire an environmentalist tint: school-teachers, journalists, government bureaucrats, politicians, industrialists, scientists, citizens' groups, philosophers – everyone eagerly donned the green mantle. Yet it also ran shallow, in the sense that the more radical aspects of the green vision utterly failed to take hold.<sup>46</sup>

There are problems with Bess's foregrounding of public 'ambivalence' towards technology. For one, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure, and we should also ask how far the idea can really take us: if 'ambivalence' represents a middle ground between total enthusiasm and complete rejection, then it is surely an extremely common emotional reaction, suitable for describing general public opinion on a vast array of subjects. It is also worth asking just how much technological ambivalence there ever really was, given the central role that technology occupies in present-day Western (and indeed non-Western) societies. Nevertheless, Bess offers a convincing interpretation of the rise of environmental politics. He rightly plays down the role of radicalism, and presents environmental policy as a compromise between modernisation and the protection of rural and urban surroundings. While it is important to recognise that environmental politics in France developed within a particular national context, the notion of 'shallow greening' offers a useful framework within which to consider the British case.

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<sup>45</sup> Bess, *The Light-Green Society*, pp. 12, 21-2, 37

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

In mid-twentieth century Britain, as in France, there were significant levels of technological enthusiasm. Ortolano writes that in the post-war decades ‘the “modern” seemed to promise liberation from the past and [the coming of] a preferable future’.<sup>47</sup> Becky Conekin et al use the term ‘high modernity’ with reference to post-war Britain, arguing that ‘there were clear and identifiable languages of modernisation (accompanied by adjacent terms such as “the new” and “the future”) occurring across British society’.<sup>48</sup> In her work on the 1951 Festival of Britain, Conekin examines how modernity was negotiated in this post-war British context, demonstrating the ways in which the Labour governments of Clement Attlee emphasised the importance of progress and stressed the role that science and technology would play in building a better Britain.<sup>49</sup> Yet, while the notion of progress was central to the vision presented at the Festival of Britain, this did not necessitate the complete abandonment of the past. As Conekin shows, alongside futuristic demonstrations of technological ingenuity, Festival exhibitions on ‘the Land’ and ‘the People’ placed emphasis on Britain’s natural beauty and its people’s historic connection with the land.<sup>50</sup> In Conekin’s view, Britain in the post-war period ‘saw itself generally as a special combination of the ancient and the modern’, and thus at the Festival modernism ‘combined with the most traditional imaginings of Englishness or Britishness’.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of modernity can also help to inform understanding of the growth of the state in Britain. In his work on the nineteenth century, James Vernon characterises modernity as arising as the result of ‘the sustained and rapid growth of a

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<sup>47</sup> Ortolano, *Two Cultures*, p. 21

<sup>48</sup> Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds.), *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-64* (London, 1999), pp. 10-11

<sup>49</sup> Becky Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003), p. 46

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32, 80



population that was increasingly concentrated in urban areas, and mobile over ever-greater distances'. For Vernon, a key characteristic of modernity is the creation of a 'society of strangers', within which traditional structures of local and personal relations are no longer adequate for the management of social, economic and political challenges. One outcome of modernity is the creation of new forms of bureaucracy, and the extension of state governance to manage the problems posed by industrialisation, urbanisation and mobility.<sup>52</sup> Vernon's conceptualisation of modernity can be applied to environmental politics, which has undoubtedly entailed the regulation of problems arising from industrial activity and the arrival of the 'society of strangers', and has led to new forms of government intervention. As Patrick Joyce notes, even under governments, such as Margaret Thatcher's, that have expressed the desire to 'roll back' its parameters, the reach of the state has continued to extend into new areas.<sup>53</sup> The environment offers a good example of the tendency for modernity to create new problems of governance that lead to extended forms of governmental regulation.

In considering mid-century Britain in terms of modernity, it is important to acknowledge the centrality of rising standards of living. While Harold Macmillan's assertion in July 1957 that many people had 'never had it so good' has become something of a cliché for describing post-war Britain, Mark Donnelly points out that the Prime Minister's words reflected reality for large numbers of Britons, who by the late 1950s 'were healthier, better-educated, better-housed and more prosperous than ever before'.<sup>54</sup> As Arthur Marwick writes, 'average weekly earnings rose 34 per cent between 1955 and 1960, and 130 per cent between 1955 and 1969'. Disposable

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<sup>52</sup> James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (London, 2014), pp. 128-29

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Joyce, *The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State since 1800* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 310

<sup>54</sup> Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (Harlow, 2005), pp. 22-23

income rose steadily, almost doubling between 1951 and 1974, and this was accompanied by a comparable rise in expenditure on consumer goods.<sup>55</sup> With regards to the consumer boom, Dominic Sandbrook notes that there was continuity between the inter-war and post-war periods, as it was during the 1930s that many households were first connected to the electricity grid, and ‘middle-class consumers first became familiar with radios, vacuum cleaners, cookers, electric irons and family cars’.<sup>56</sup> Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton point out that Britain’s twentieth-century history contains a paradox. While the nation did undergo relative economic decline, the mass of the British people experienced an enormous, albeit uneven, improvement in living standards, and that trend was accompanied by rising public expectations.<sup>57</sup> A similar point is made by Rubinstein, who writes that while ‘declinist’ authors have focused on a downturn in national economic performance, the post-war decades saw ‘the most marked and singular rise in the standard of living for the ordinary Englishman and woman of any period in history’.<sup>58</sup>

In that context, it would have been extremely difficult for advocates of environmental policies to challenge the twin discourses of modernity and affluence. In his work on the connection between the landscape and Englishness in the inter-war years, David Matless shows how campaigners for the preservation of the countryside negotiated this problem by tempering their Romantic inclinations and appealing to the dominant priorities of the period. Matless focuses on the CPRE, and notes that ‘the common identification of preservation with nostalgia and anti-

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<sup>55</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958–c.1974* (Oxford, 1998), p. 258; Peter Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London, 2006), pp. 520–21

<sup>56</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005), p. 107; Jon Lawrence, ‘Class, “affluence” and the study of everyday life in Britain, c. 1930–64’, *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2013), pp. 273–99

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, ‘The uses (and abuses) of affluence’, in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 1

<sup>58</sup> Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture and Decline*, p. 41

modernity does not hold'.<sup>59</sup> As tempting as it may be to view campaigners for rural protection as anti-modern, Matless argues that 'the movement for preservation entailed not a conservative protection of the old against the new but an attempt to plan a landscape simultaneously modern and traditional under the guidance of an expert public authority'. For that reason, Matless characterises the CPRE as part of a 'planner-preservationist' movement, committed to allying 'preservation and progress, tradition and modernity, city and country in order to define Englishness as orderly and modern'.<sup>60</sup>

The desire of the CPRE to plan the English landscape was in keeping with the wider political enthusiasm for 'planning' in the inter-war and post-war periods. Alongside rising interest in the 'rational', long-term planning of a national economic strategy, expressed through the work of coalitions of 'middle opinion' such as Political and Economic Planning and the Next Five Years Group, the 1930s saw growing calls for the organised planning of the physical development of both town and country.<sup>61</sup> Gordon E. Cherry notes that strides were made in the furtherance of state intervention during the inter-war years, most notably through the passage of the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act, and that 'planning' had entered the vocabularies both of political parties and of local authorities by the outbreak of war in 1939.<sup>62</sup> However, it was not until wartime that planning moved to the centre of British political life. John Stevenson argues that 'the planning movement of the 1930s was to find its apotheosis in the conduct of the war and the plans for post-war reconstruction', with town and country planning providing 'the most decisive

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<sup>59</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), p. 14

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 25

<sup>61</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'Middle opinion in the thirties: planning, progress and political "agreement"', *English Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 311 (1964), pp. 285, 294

<sup>62</sup> Gordon E. Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900* (Oxford, 1996), p. 86

example of the war acting as an agent of deliberate plans for the future'.<sup>63</sup> A Ministry of Town and Country Planning was established in 1943, and, as Matless notes, when Britain went to the polls in July 1945, all political parties felt obliged to speak the language of planning.<sup>64</sup> Dennis Hardy describes 1945 as a high water mark for physical planning, as the Labour government set about implementing a programme that included the establishment of new towns, comprehensive town and country planning legislation, and the creation of National Parks.<sup>65</sup>

It has been argued that town and country planning formed part of a post-war consensus in British politics. Paul Addison writes that faith in economic planning dovetailed with a belief in planning the environment, while Cherry suggests that by the late 1940s there was a 'broad consensus' whereby 'the administrative elite in governance and business saw merit in the virtues of planning'.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Stevenson argues that 'the countryside had become an integral component of the post-war consensus', with both the Labour and Conservative parties willing to use state power to regulate its development.<sup>67</sup> Against such perspectives must be weighed the arguments of those that question the existence of such a consensus. Daniel Ritschel argues that accounts of the planning debates of the 1930s and 1940s have tended to ignore the ideological dimension, and in so doing have overlooked the intense disagreement that continued around an issue that cut across questions of property rights and the relationship between the individual and the state.<sup>68</sup> While Ritschel

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<sup>63</sup> John Stevenson, "Planners' moon? The Second World War and the planning movement", in H.L. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 67, 69

<sup>64</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 199

<sup>65</sup> Dennis Hardy, *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning For Town and Country Planning, 1946-1990* (London, 1991), p. 24

<sup>66</sup> Paul Addison, *No Turning Back: The Peacetime Revolutions of Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 2010), p. 28; Cherry, *Town Planning*, pp. 117-18

<sup>67</sup> John Stevenson, "The countryside, planning and civil society in Britain, 1926-1947", in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003) p. 211

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Ritschel, *The Politics of Planning: The Debate on Economic Planning in Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1997), p. 13

refers to the debate over economic planning, the argument can also be applied to the physical planning of town and country. As this thesis shows, the issue acquired a different emphasis when approached from left or right, and there were significant disagreements between the Labour and Conservative parties over how much government intervention was required. It is also worth questioning the extent to which the public were invested in the ideal of planning. Nick Tiratsoo cautions against assuming that 'ordinary people in the 1940s had clear views about what a future Britain would be like' and that they 'desired to participate actively in its making'. Beyond concerns around housing, 'only a very small minority really felt very strongly about wider questions of development'.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, it is not necessary to believe in what Ben Pimlott calls 'the Shangri La of a lost consensus' in order to acknowledge that there was a level of political agreement on the desirability of planning in post-war Britain.<sup>70</sup> Both Labour and the Conservatives spoke the language, and they were willing to extend state intervention in the physical planning of the land, albeit with differing emphases and to varying degrees. As Glen O'Hara shows, this is a language that they would continue to speak into the 1960s, with both parties putting forward confident and comprehensive long term plans in a multitude of policy areas.<sup>71</sup>

### **The thesis outlined**

This thesis argues that the inter-war and post-war periods were crucial to the development of environmental politics in Britain. Between the late 1920s and the early 1970s, a range of problems were identified as arising from the interaction

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<sup>69</sup> Nick Tiratsoo, "New vistas": the Labour Party, citizenship and the built environment in the 1940s', in Richard Weight and Abigail Beach (eds.), *The Right to Belong: Citizenship and National Identity in Britain, 1930-1960* (London, 1998), pp. 148, 151-52

<sup>70</sup> Ben Pimlott, 'The myth of consensus', in *Frustrate their Knavish Tricks: Writings on Biography, History and Politics* (London, 1994), pp. 233-34

<sup>71</sup> Glen O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment: Economic and Social Planning in 1960s Britain* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 2-3

between society and its natural and built surroundings, and political actors on both the left and the right sought to mitigate them through the extension of state regulation. Whereas many existing accounts have emphasised the importance of 1960s 'counter-culture' and radical critiques of human interaction with the environment, it is the contention of this thesis that environmental politics in Britain developed in the political mainstream, taking shape amid efforts to address new challenges of governance. The rejection of modernity, in the form of industrialisation, urban life, consumer culture and economic growth, was never anything more than a minority position within British politics, and successful arguments for environmental protection had to be framed in line with dominant social and political priorities.

In keeping with this, the thesis does not provide an account of environmental politics that foregrounds the emergence of a social movement. In their account of the growth of NGOs in post-war Britain, Matthew Hilton et al rightly observe that environmental organisations have not, on the whole, been characterised by their radicalism. Even groups such as Greenpeace and FOE, which are often cast as archetypes of post-1970 radical environmentalism, underwent a process of moderation and professionalisation soon after their formation, with their sizable memberships playing the role largely of a passive and loyal base of support for what was essentially the business of technocratic, expert lobbying of national and local government.<sup>72</sup> For Hilton et al, NGOs represent not a backlash against mainstream politics rooted in the rebellious spirit of the late 1960s, but rather a

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<sup>72</sup> Hilton et al, *Politics of Expertise*, pp. 102, 165-66

professionalisation of politics in the post-war era, whereby both state and non-state actors participated in the increasingly complex process of governance.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, where campaigning organisations feature in this thesis, it is as lobbyists contributing to the development of environmental governance, rather than as representatives of a movement dedicated to overturning established social norms. The groups that feature, such as the CPRE and the National Trust, represent a moderate mode of thought that will be referred to as *preservationist* or *conservationist*, in contrast to the radical *ecologism* discussed by authors such as Dobson and Bramwell. While the latter has been characterised as *ecocentric* in its outlook, preservationism remained to a large extent human centred, or *anthropocentric*, with a focus on addressing environmental problems because of their implications for society. The human-centred outlook of conservationist organisations was underlined by their frequent use of the word ‘amenity’ with reference to the aim of preserving rural and urban surroundings. Rather than viewing protection as worthwhile for its own sake, such organisations pursued their aims on account of the perceived social advantages of a satisfactory environment.

Such anthropocentrism has been central to the development of environmental politics in Britain. Throughout the decades under consideration in this thesis, environmental policy was formulated in response to man-made problems that had negative implications for human society. This is why the definition of the ‘environment’ must include both ‘natural’ and built surroundings. Environmental policy-making covered rural problems, such as the destruction of the countryside and the pollution of unspoilt coastline, but it also covered problems that were firmly urban in character, such as the pollution of the air by domestic and industrial coal

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp. 55, 62-63, 190

burning, and the challenge of integrating mass car ownership into city life. As the term 'environment' became incorporated into political discourse, it was used with reference to both the urban and the rural, and the 'natural' and the built. What all environmental problems had in common was that they arose as unwanted or unintended side effects of the developments associated with modernity, which may include industrialisation, urbanisation, mass affluence and consumerism. For the most part, environmental policy did not amount to an attempt to halt or reverse such processes. Instead, the aim was to regulate development, retaining the advantages while controlling the negative side effects. To some extent, the present-day principle of sustainable development found early expression in the environmental policies of the inter-war and post-war periods.

At the top of the list of unwanted side effects were those that posed genuine threats to human health, and as such the emergence of the environment as a sphere of public policy cannot be separated from developments in the political management of risk. Anthony Giddens describes modernity as a 'double-edged phenomenon', in which the creation of 'vastly greater opportunities for human beings' has occurred alongside the increased risk to human life and welfare posed by industrialisation.<sup>74</sup> In Giddens' view, industrialisation transformed the basis of risk. Whereas 'the risk environment of traditional cultures was dominated by the hazards of the physical world', in modernity 'the dangers we face no longer derive from the world of nature'. Instead modern 'ecological threats are the outcome of socially organised knowledge, mediated by the impact of industrialism upon the material environment'.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Ulrich Beck argues that 'the gain in power from techno-economic progress [has been] overshadowed by the production of risks'. Whereas in the early stages of

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<sup>74</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 1, 7

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106, 110



industrialisation hazards tended to be 'limited to certain localities or groups', in the twentieth century it became apparent that modernisation posed significant dangers to the health of entire communities and societies, and perhaps even threatened the existence of all life on earth. As a result, risk came to 'achieve a central importance in social and political debates'. As publics in industrialised nations became increasingly aware that the 'sources of wealth' produced 'hazardous side effects', responsibility fell to governments to take steps to mitigate new threats to human health.<sup>76</sup>

However, the development of environmental politics was not simply related to concern for public health. Although risk played a role in determining public policy, there was also in the mid-twentieth century increased political attention to the perceived need to bring about improvements in 'quality of life'. While this naturally included improvements to health, it also encapsulated desires for heightened levels of wellbeing that were not directly connected to physical risk. It is in this respect that use may be made of Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism. As levels of affluence rose in the twentieth century, and basic standards of health and material need were satisfied, the public increasingly looked to government to secure new levels of comfort. In relation to the natural and built environment, measures of quality of life could include aesthetic satisfaction, freedom from air and noise pollution, the availability of leisure space (both in town and country), and the ability to travel quickly and conveniently. As this thesis shows, during the post-war period both the Conservative and Labour parties came to view the securing of quality of life as a potential vote winner among all classes, and environmental protection was presented as a desirable aim that could be pursued alongside continuing economic growth. The

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<sup>76</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London, 1992), pp. 12-13, 20

public was perceived to desire not only affluence, but also an environment in which to enjoy its benefits.

In sections of the existing literature, it is argued that the environment did not acquire mainstream political significance in Britain until the 1980s, or perhaps even as late as the 1990s. For example, Neil Carter suggests that there was only incipient party political interest in environmental issues before the mid-1980s, and writes that parties only began to incorporate the environment into their agendas once they came under threat from radical greens.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Mike Robinson argues that a 'greening' of British politics took place in the 1980s 'after years of relative neglect'.<sup>78</sup> In the view of McCormick, successive British governments responded slowly to environmental problems during the post-war period, before coming under pressure from the environmental movement from the 1970s onwards.<sup>79</sup> This thesis does not dispute the view that the environment increased in political importance during those later decades, but it does argue that it was already established in British politics by the beginning of the 1970s, and contend that, in order to understand later developments, it is necessary to pay attention to the events of earlier decades. In the inter-war years, and then in the immediate post-war period, the role of the state in regulating environmental problems expanded dramatically, and the 'environment' took shape as a concept that encapsulated a range of governmental challenges.

This thesis explores this process by examining five key episodes: the development of National Parks and town and country planning policy during the 1930s and 1940s; smoke pollution and the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1956; the implementation of

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<sup>77</sup> Neil Carter, 'Party politicisation of the environment in Britain', *Party Politics*, vol. 12, no. 6 (2006), p. 752; Neil Carter, 'Greening the mainstream: party politics and the environment', *Environmental Politics*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2013), p. 74

<sup>78</sup> Mike Robinson, *The Greening of British Party Politics* (Manchester, 1992), p. 1

<sup>79</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. 127

Britain's nuclear power programme and its relationship to countryside preservation in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the growth of political interest in 'environmental' problems during the 1960s, and the eventual formation of the Department of the Environment in 1970; and the challenge of traffic in town, with a focus upon the proposals for the construction of a motorway network in London in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The five episodes have been selected because of the insight that analysis can provide into the evolution of the politics of the environment over the course of the inter-war and post-war periods, as a range of problems, impacting both urban and rural surroundings, became conceptualised as 'environmental', and recognised as components of a unified field of public policy. Each of the problems explored in the five central chapters was integral to the environmental programme of the British government by the early 1970s, which marks the end point of the period examined by this thesis.

As the following literature review shows, there is an existing, although uneven, body of historiography for each of the five case studies which locates environmental problems within a broader political and cultural climate that valued rationality, scientific expertise and economic growth, and, in contrast to explanations that have been set within the framework of the 'declinist' thesis, does not present environmental politics as the product of an 'anti-industrial' mind-set. This thesis builds upon this literature but also pushes beyond it. While the five cases are already familiar to historians, there is value in reassessing them together in terms of the broader question of how the politics of the environment developed over the course of the inter-war and post-war years. By considering the episodes alongside one another, it is possible to draw out important links and continuities across the period that are not developed in the present historiography. Rather than viewing the cases in

isolation, it is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate how each distinct environmental problem contributed to the emergence of the ‘environment’ as a field of policy and drove the expansion of the British state’s responsibility for both built and natural surroundings. This thesis also takes a different approach from much of the existing literature, in that it focuses upon the role of government and the leading political parties in shaping environmental policy. The existing literature goes some way towards redressing the emphasis elsewhere upon radical activism and an ‘anti-industrial’ spirit, but there remains a disproportionate focus upon the work of organised campaigning groups, albeit those of a ‘moderate’ rather than a radical character. Additionally, there is a tendency for existing works to examine either a rural or an urban problem, neglecting the links between the two and their overlapping roles in the development of environmental politics. It should also be noted that the existing literature is more extensive for some of the episodes examined here than it is for others. As will be shown, while there are strong bodies of work on National Parks and the Clean Air Act, other cases, such as the construction of nuclear power stations and, particularly, the creation of the Department of the Environment, have been subjects of limited historical research.

Chapter two of this thesis investigates the debate around the preservation of the countryside in the inter-war period, and the eventual passage of National Parks and town and country planning legislation by the Attlee government in the late 1940s. As has been noted, the existing literature on National Parks is relatively extensive. John Sheail has traced the institutional developments leading up to the 1949 act in two articles, while his study *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* explores the wider interest in preservation and planning in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>80</sup> The genesis of

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<sup>80</sup> See John Sheail, ‘The concept of National Parks in Great Britain 1900-1950’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 66 (1975), pp. 41-56; John Sheail, ‘John Dower, National Parks, and

National Parks policy is also outlined by Gordon E. Cherry in his official history of the subject, published in 1975.<sup>81</sup> This existing work explains how National Parks legislation came to be passed, but it does not provide an in-depth analysis of the arguments made in favour of preservation, nor examine the broader political context of the debates.

Perhaps the most insightful work on the inter-war period comes from Matless, who, as is noted earlier in this introduction, explores the emergence of what he terms a 'planner-preservationist' movement in the inter-war period, exemplified by the CPRE and its campaigns to restore a sense of order to the relationship between the urban and the rural.<sup>82</sup> Matless points out that inter-war preservationism should not be seen as a form of anti-modern, pastoral Romanticism. Instead, we should recognise that it sought to reconcile progress with preservation, using expert knowledge to protect the countryside while encouraging the continuation of well-planned urban and industrial development.<sup>83</sup> Inter-war preservation is also the subject of an important study by Bill Luckin, which explores the debate surrounding the construction of the national electricity grid between 1927 and 1934. Luckin presents the debate as involving a clash between 'triumphalists', who argued that 'economy, society and culture would be rapidly and radically transformed by the new source of energy', and 'traditionalists', who fought for the protection of the rural landscape in the face of the threat of a national network of pylons. While electricity industry lobbyists, with the enthusiastic backing of the British state, advanced

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town and country planning in Britain', *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 10 (1995), pp. 1-16; John Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 1981)

<sup>81</sup> Gordon E. Cherry, *Environmental Planning, 1939-1969. Vol. 2: National Parks and Recreation in the Countryside* (London, 1975)

<sup>82</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 14

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25

triumphalism, the traditionalist cause was represented by local and national preservationist organisations, with the CPRE playing a leading role.<sup>84</sup>

Chapter two builds upon the work of both Luckin and Matless. In the case of Luckin, it is useful to note the British state's commitment to technological triumphalism and the public's support for innovation, and the obstacle that this presented to arguments for the protection of the rural environment. However, it is important that preservationism is not presented as entirely traditionalist in character. Luckin goes some way to acknowledging this, noting that the CPRE moderated its stance in the 1930s, and examining the diversity of viewpoints among its leading lights, including the willingness of the planner and campaigner Patrick Abercrombie to seek accommodation between preservation and development, but ultimately the emphasis in his work is upon the clash between triumphalism and traditionalism over the national grid, and there is need for a fuller discussion of the growing interest among mainstream political actors in the protection of the countryside during the inter-war years.<sup>85</sup>

With this in mind, Matless's identification of 'planner-preservationism' is of particular importance. He is absolutely correct to argue that campaigners sought to reconcile progress and preservation during the inter-war period, and this thesis takes this idea further, arguing that such a vision was present not only in campaigning organisations such as the CPRE, but also in the wider political community. To a greater extent than existing studies, chapter two investigates why government was eventually convinced to implement National Parks, and it is argued that the policy appealed to political actors on two levels. On the one hand, National Parks offered a

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<sup>84</sup> Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in Inter-War Britain* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 1-3, 94

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 100, 165

means of ‘rationalising development’, reconciling ongoing economic progress with a desire to protect and preserve, while the policy also contained a public health dimension, with Parks presented as a potential space for healthy outdoor recreation for the nation’s urban population, and a means for offsetting the risks of urban life. The eventual passage of the Attlee government’s 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act represented significant extensions of the state’s control over the development of the countryside and, as subsequent chapters of this thesis show, post-war environmental policy would continue to be shaped by the desire to seek accommodation between modernity and the protection of both rural and urban surroundings.

In chapter three, attention turns from the rural to the urban environment, with examination of the problem of air pollution. The chapter focuses on the London smog disaster of December 1952, which was held responsible for the deaths of more than 4,000 people, and explores how that event led to the passage of the 1956 Clean Air Act, which gave local authorities new powers to control the emission of coal smoke in urban areas. As with National Parks, the case of the London smog and the Clean Air Act has received significant attention from historians. One of the first academic assessments of the passage of the act came in 1975 from Roy Parker, who examined the events that led to legislative action, and argued that the smog, and the political pressure that followed, were key to the introduction of new air pollution regulations. Parker’s account was written without access to the official documents, and thus fails to provide insight into the government’s perspective, and while it analyses the political debate around clean air, it does not place the discussion in its wider political context.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson’s 1981 study of

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<sup>86</sup> Roy Parker, ‘The struggle for clean air’, in Phoebe Hall, Hilary Land, Roy Parker and Adrian Webb (eds.), *Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy* (London, 1975), pp. 371-409

the politics of clean air and Peter Brimblecombe's 1987 history of smoke pollution in London both provide overviews of how legislation was proposed and passed in the years following 1952, but do not analyse the debate in depth.<sup>87</sup>

A number of later studies have investigated the long-term history of air pollution in Britain. Stephen Mosley has explored the impact of smoke in Victorian England, in particular in Manchester and Salford, and provides a thorough account of local and national efforts to tackle air pollution from industrial and domestic sources.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, both Mosley and Catherine Mills have written about the difficulties in the twentieth century of persuading the British public to part with their open coal fires, which were identified as a leading cause of air pollution.<sup>89</sup> The subject has also received attention from Luckin, who writes in a short chapter that the key question around the Clean Air Act is how 'in this particular time, this particular environmental dilemma came, finally, to be interpreted as unendurable?' Luckin argues that it was long-term technological change, in the form of the development of smokeless fuels, together with the 'human tragedy' of the 1952 smog that finally prompted change.<sup>90</sup>

The most comprehensive study is that by the environmental historian Peter Thorsheim, who explores the history of air pollution in Britain from the Middle Ages onwards, with particular attention to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Influenced by the work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas, particularly her assertion that conceptions of pollution are culturally determined, Thorsheim argues

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<sup>87</sup> Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson, *The Politics of Clean Air* (Oxford, 1981); Peter Brimblecombe, *A History of Air Pollution in London Since Medieval Times* (London, 1987)

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge, 2001)

<sup>89</sup> Stephen Mosley, 'The home fires: heat, health and atmospheric pollution in Britain, 1900-45', in Mark Jackson (ed.), *Health and the Modern Home* (London, 2007), pp. 196-223; Catherine Mills, 'Coal, clean air, and the regulation of the domestic hearth in post-war Britain', in Jackson, *Health and the Modern Home*, pp. 224-43

<sup>90</sup> Bill Luckin, 'Pollution in the city', in Martin Daunt (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 208, 211



that the idea of pollution was invented in Britain in the late nineteenth century in response to the smoke problem. He provides a convincing account of the impact of the 1952 smog, but pays more attention to medical responses and changing perceptions of pollution than he does to the political processes that led to the passage of legislation.<sup>91</sup>

While chapter three draws upon these existing studies, it offers a new interpretation of the Clean Air Act by examining its passage in the context of wider problems facing post-war governments, including growing public expectations of state action to secure citizen wellbeing, and assessing the role of air pollution in the emergence of the environment as a new sphere of government policy. It is argued that the Clean Air Act reflected the willingness of post-war British governments to extend state regulation of both the urban and rural environments, with the aim of reconciling economic development with the provision of amenable surroundings, and enhancing the public's experience of modernity. In existing studies, there is significant criticism of the governmental response to the London smog – for example, Parker suggests that the Conservative government was disinterested in the smog problem, and Thorsheim writes that it sought to 'escape blame' and 'avoid being pressured into stricter controls on air pollution'.<sup>92</sup> It is argued by those authors that NGOs, particularly the National Smoke Abatement Society, were integral to ensuring that the government felt compelled to act.<sup>93</sup> By contrast, chapter three of this thesis argues that government did more than it is usually given credit for, and questions the importance of campaigning organisations. While there was a certain amount of

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<sup>91</sup> Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Ohio, 2006), pp. 2, 194; On cultural constructions of 'pollution', see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966)

<sup>92</sup> Parker, 'Struggle for clean air', pp. 380-81, 393, 407-9

<sup>93</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 165; Peter Thorsheim, 'Interpreting the London fog disaster of 1952', in E. Melanie Dupuis (ed.), *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution* (New York, 2004), p. 159

reluctance at Cabinet level, there was nevertheless an acceptance that the political context of the 1950s, particularly in terms of public expectations of the welfare state, necessitated government intervention. The chapter acknowledges Thorsheim's argument that scientific and medical expertise was crucial to the identification of smoke pollution as a public health problem, but builds upon this by suggesting that the government deserves greater credit for bringing such expertise to bear and moving forward with the implementation of a policy solution informed by technical advice.<sup>94</sup>

In chapter four, this thesis returns to the rural environment, exploring Britain's early nuclear power programme and its implications for the countryside. While plans in the 1950s to establish nuclear power in Britain generated a high degree of official and public enthusiasm, proposals to site power stations in remote rural areas, such as Bradwell in Essex, Dungeness in Kent, and Trawsfynydd in North Wales, led to fierce debates, and a series of local public inquiries were held before governmental permission was given for the construction of atomic installations. While the technicalities of Britain's nuclear power programme have received extensive coverage, less attention has been paid to the inquiries into the siting of the first power stations in the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>95</sup> In his study of the reception of nuclear power by the British public, the political scientist Ian Welsh draws on the published reports (but not the archival sources) of two public inquiries from the 1950s – Bradwell and Hunterston in Ayrshire – in order to argue that public anxieties around radiation were present from the beginning of the nuclear power programme.<sup>96</sup> Chapter four disputes Welsh's claim, noting that evidence for such

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<sup>94</sup> Thorsheim, 'Interpreting the London fog disaster', p. 161

<sup>95</sup> On the broader history of Britain's nuclear power programme, see Roger Williams, *The Nuclear Power Decisions: British Policies, 1953-78* (London, 1980)

<sup>96</sup> Ian Welsh, *Mobilizing Modernity: The Nuclear Moment* (London, 2000), pp. 68, 71, 93

anxieties is not readily apparent in the archival records, and arguing that a focus on radiation distracts from the central debate at the inquiries, which concerned technological development on the one hand and, on the other, the appeal for the preservation of Britain's rural landscape. That debate is discussed by Luckin at the end of his study of the national grid, in which he argues that the triumphalist commitment to scientific and technological advancement continued to define the British state's approach in the immediate post-war decades.<sup>97</sup>

Luckin's insight is an important one, but it is necessary to say more about the discussions around the siting of nuclear power stations, and to examine the full set of public inquiries (Luckin only looks at the Bradwell inquiry). Nuclear power is an important case study because it highlights the complexity of the politics of the environment in the post-war decades. While there was indeed a triumphalist tone to the official case for nuclear power, the siting debates exemplify the contradictions of British government policy. On the one hand, Labour and Conservative administrations wished to advance the nation's technological standing and economic development, but at the same time they committed the British state to the statutory preservation of amenity and the rural landscape, through the passage of National Parks and town and country planning legislation. Triumphalism coincided with an official willingness to take steps to protect the environment. Nor can the arguments made by objectors to the power stations easily be characterised as traditionalist in tone. Preservationists advanced their case, but often did so within the framework of modernity, appealing for reconciliation between technological development and conservation. Their representations at the inquiries rarely stand out as evidence for an 'anti-industrial' spirit. However, it is necessary to note that nuclear power

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<sup>97</sup> Luckin, *Questions of Power*, pp. 172-74

ultimately demonstrates the limits of environmental politics in the post-war period. While government took a sympathetic stance towards conservation, it was not willing to override its commitment to economic modernisation, and for that reason all of the power stations contested at the inquiries were eventually constructed.

In chapter five, the focus is on the role of central government in the 1960s, as it sought to address a range of rural and urban problems. The chapter culminates with the creation of the Department of the Environment (DOE) by the Conservative government of Edward Heath in 1970. The British government was the first in the world to establish a dedicated environmental ministry at cabinet level, yet the creation of the DOE has received little attention in the historical literature.<sup>98</sup>

*Whitehall*, Peter Hennessy's study of the history of the civil service, does not explore the reasons for the department's creation, while James Radcliffe's book, *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, deals with it largely in terms of the Heath government's wider reforms to the machinery of government.<sup>99</sup> The DOE receives some attention in works on the environment and environmental activism in Britain, but even that literature does not examine its history in detail. John Sheail covers it briefly in his environmental history of twentieth century Britain, noting that there was political capital to be made from environmental protection by the end of the 1960s.<sup>100</sup> In *The Greening of British Party Politics*, Mike Robinson suggests that the creation of the DOE 'symbolised the advent of a new political awareness' of environmental issues, but focuses largely on the 1970s and 1980s, arguing that the 'greening' of politics only really occurred during those decades.<sup>101</sup> In his study of the

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<sup>98</sup> Robin Grove-White, 'The rise of the environmental movement, 1970-1990', in T.C Smout (ed.), *Nature, Landscape and People Since the Second World War* (East Linton, 2001), p. 45

<sup>99</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (London, 1989), pp. 436-40; James Radcliffe, *The Reorganisation of British Government* (Aldershot, 1991), chapter 4

<sup>100</sup> John Sheail, *An Environmental History of Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 2002), pp. 271-2

<sup>101</sup> Robinson, *Greening of British Politics*, pp. 11, 205

global environmental movement, John McCormick briefly outlines some of the events that led to the department's creation but concludes – somewhat strangely given how little academic attention it has received – that it 'is often given greater significance than it deserves'.<sup>102</sup>

Chapter five aims to redress the lack of attention given to the DOE, arguing that the department's creation was a significant moment in the development of environmental politics in Britain. Throughout the 1960s, both Conservative and Labour governments proved attentive to what were increasingly being conceptualised as 'environmental' issues, and, far from being a mere administrative change to the machinery of Whitehall, the creation of the DOE represented the conscious formalisation of the environment as a field of policy. The new Department was formed in part as a response to the difficulty of incorporating mass car ownership into the fabric of Britain's towns and cities. The effects of urban traffic congestion were considered to be the greatest environmental challenge of the period, with successive governments seeking planning solutions to the problem, and it was in that context that the word 'environment' began to acquire political resonance, used to refer to the desirability of reconciling the car with amenable urban surroundings. During the 1960s, the problem of pollution also rose up the political agenda, not least because of the *Torrey Canyon* tanker disaster of March 1967, which saw 120,000 tons of crude oil spilled into the sea off the Cornish coast. The Labour government of Harold Wilson proved particularly attentive to pollution, putting in place new regulatory mechanisms at home, and playing an active role in discussions abroad, including preparations for the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. For both main parties, the perception that the public desired the

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<sup>102</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. 129

enhancement of 'quality of life' was central to their growing attention to environmental issues, and by the early 1970s this was reflected both in the existence of the DOE, and in commitments in party election manifestoes. In contrast to studies that have presented the rise of environmental politics during the 1960s as a counter-cultural reaction against industrialism and economic development, chapter five points to the creation of the DOE to argue that environmental politics was shaped in Britain by conventional political actors as part of an effort to deliver higher standards of living and manage anxieties associated with post-war technological modernity.

Finally, in chapter six, the thesis examines the challenge of traffic in towns in greater detail. Whereas chapter five explores the issue in relation to its impact on the machinery of central government, chapter six looks more closely at the social and environmental impact of traffic, and the debates that arose over how to address the problem. Specifically, the chapter examines the challenge of traffic in Greater London, where there was an attempt in the late 1960s to address it through the construction of a network of four urban motorways. The proposal, put forward by the Greater London Council (GLC) in its Greater London Development Plan (GLDP), became the subject of intense opposition, and led to what was at the time the largest public inquiry in British history.

In spite of its size, the GLDP inquiry has not received widespread coverage in the historical literature. One important exception is a chapter by John Davis, which examines the demise of the Plan in the face of public opposition, and points to the limitations of comprehensive planning in offering 'simple solutions to complex

problems'.<sup>103</sup> Davis's focus is not upon the significance of the GLDP for the development of environmental politics, but his work nonetheless contains some valuable insights, particularly his observation that the inquiry involved a clash between two features of post-war affluence in mass car ownership and increased owner-occupation of housing.<sup>104</sup> Chapter six builds upon this work, arguing that affluence was central to the conflict over the future of urban surroundings during the 1960s and early 1970s, while providing a deeper exploration of the implications of the traffic problem for the emergence of the environment as a field of public policy. Beyond London, even the broader issue of traffic in towns does not feature prominently in the historiography. An article by Simon Gunn offers an important contribution, rightly noting that the work of the town planner Colin Buchanan, in particular his influential 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*, played a role in the development of environmental discourse in Britain.<sup>105</sup> However, Buchanan's contribution warrants further discussion. Gunn correctly argues that presented a vision that combined modernism and conservationism, but it is important to note that he found himself on the side of the GLC during the GLDP debate. For the objectors to the motorways, Buchanan's vision represented a grave threat to the environment of London, and this clash is explored in depth in chapter six.<sup>106</sup> Additionally, urban motorways appear in the wider literature on the history of motorways in Britain, but their implications are not explored in detail, and the link to the development of environmental politics is not developed in significant depth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> John Davis, "Simple solutions to complex problems": the Greater London Council and the Greater London Development Plan, 1965-1973', in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003) pp. 249-74

<sup>104</sup> Davis, 'Simple solutions', pp. 256-59

<sup>105</sup> Simon Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report, environment and the problem of traffic in 1960s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), pp. 521-42

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 529

<sup>107</sup> See David Starkie, *The Motorway Age: Road and Traffic Policies in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 1982); George Charlesworth, *A History of British Motorways* (London, 1984); Peter Merriman, *Driving Spaces: A*

Chapter six uses the GLDP inquiry to show how the traffic problem was central to the development of environmental politics. During the 1960s, the problem came to be conceptualised as ‘environmental’, and proposals for solving it were framed in terms of the need to secure a ‘good’ environment. At the GLDP inquiry, the environment became the battleground on which the motorways plan was contested, with both supporters and opponents of the proposal expressing an aim of improving London’s environment. The inquiry underlines the connection between environmental politics and ‘quality of life’, as for both sides the motorways were seen as an environmental issue because of their potential implications for living standards. While the ‘environment’ was still a loosely defined political term, it was by the early 1970s established as the label for a range of policy problems, including countryside preservation, pollution, and traffic congestion in towns, all of which were considered to relate to the quality of life. In terms of state responsibility, this no longer meant simply securing basic conditions of material security and public health, but also providing surroundings in which urban and rural populations could enjoy the benefits of affluence.

Together, the five central chapters of this thesis make use of a series of familiar cases in order to provide a new picture of the development of environmental politics in Britain, which places the role of the state and the work of conventional political actors at the heart of the story. The politics of the environment, at least in their most influential form, are not presented as having their origins in an ‘anti-industrial’ spirit that can be traced back to the nineteenth century, nor are they framed as the product of a radical form of 1960s activism infused with Romantic sensibilities. By contrast, this thesis presents the environment as a challenge of governance, whereby political

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*Cultural-Historical Geography of England’s M1 Motorway* (Oxford, 2007); Joe Moran, *On Roads: A Hidden History* (London, 2009), esp. chapter 7



actors responded to a series of problems, arising out of the circumstances of modernity, by enacting policies that sought to reconcile the priorities of economic growth, industrial development and technological innovation with the public desire for healthy and amenable surroundings. While environmental policies are credited with significant success, it is noted throughout this thesis that they always had their limits, particularly in instances in which they could not be squared with dominant political priorities.

This thesis is not the first study to suggest that environmental politics took shape within a society committed to science, technology and economic development, but it aims to take the argument further, demonstrating that the period between the inter-war years and the early 1970s saw the emergence of the environment as a unified field of public policy. In doing so, it picks up on some important threads in the existing literature, and uses them to highlight continuity across the period examined. Thus, Matless's identification of modernist tendencies with the CPRE, and Luckin's discussion of triumphalism around the construction of the national grid are both taken further, and used to inform the argument that governments across the inter-war and post-war decades, committed to economic and technological development, sought to reconcile those priorities with the protection and improvement of urban and rural environments. Such an aim can be discerned in the political approach to all the problems discussed, from the preservation of the countryside to the control of various forms of pollution and the challenge of traffic in towns. Similarly, the expertise that Thorsheim argues informed the response to the London smog is shown to have been applied by governments to environmental challenges across the period.

Crucially, this thesis diverges from the existing literature in terms of the central role given to government and actors within the two leading political parties. Whereas existing studies give significant credit to the work of NGOs, their relative importance is questioned here, and it is argued that the development of environmental politics was shaped less by organised campaigns, and more by the efforts of government and political parties to respond to challenges posed by twentieth century modernity. Key to driving this response were the political imperatives of affluence, as political actors sought to deliver a quality of life in keeping with the rising public expectations of the period.

### **Sources and geographical scope**

As a history of governmental and administrative developments, the thesis draws extensively upon material held in the National Archives. In chapter two, the archives of the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Works, and the Ministry of Town and Country Planning provide insight into the emergence of ideas around planning and the preservation of the countryside, and include the papers of the committees on National Parks that reported in 1931 and 1947. In chapter three, the relevant departments are the MOH and the MHLG, and detailed use is made of the papers of the Committee on Air Pollution, which was set up in 1953 and chaired by Sir Hugh Beaver. In chapter four, the British nuclear power programme is explored through the archives of a number of government departments and agencies, including the Ministry of Fuel and Power (simply the Ministry of Power from 1957), the MHLG and the UK Atomic Energy Authority. The chapter also draws extensively upon the papers produced by the public inquiries held at Bradwell, Trawsfynydd, Dungeness, Oldbury and Wylfa. In chapter five, the origins of the DOE are traced through the department's own records, as well as the papers of the MHLG. The chapter also

makes use of the archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Throughout the thesis, government sources are also drawn from the papers of the Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office. There is also extensive use of the Hansard report of parliamentary debates.

In addition to the National Archives, in chapter six the problem of urban traffic is explored through the papers of the GLDP inquiry, which are held in the records of the GLC at the London Metropolitan Archives, and through the papers of the Blackheath Motorway Action Group and its chairman, the MP for Lewisham North Roland Moyle, which are held at the Local History and Archives Centre in Lewisham. In chapter two, there is also use of the papers of the Standing Committee on National Parks, a body set up by a number of conservationist organisations in the 1930s in order to campaign for the establishment of National Parks. The Standing Committee's papers are held in the archives of the CPRE at the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading. In chapter four, there is reference to the papers of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which are held at the London School of Economics. Due to its focus on formal politics and governance, this thesis does not make a systematic attempt to trace public opinion on environmental issues (it is debatable how this could be done for the pre-1970 period, given the difficulty of using oral history and the lack of extensive opinion polling data), and it does not explore cultural constructions and representations of the 'environment'. Nevertheless, it does engage with public voices, particularly at moments where they intersect with party politics and policy-making processes. In chapter four, members of the public feature as witnesses at the nuclear power inquiries, and provide a snapshot of the variety of opinion around the atomic energy programme. Similarly, in chapter six public representations at the GLDP inquiry underline the weight of

feeling around the traffic problem, and illustrate the connection between conceptions of the 'environment' and the emphasis on quality of life. National and local newspaper sources are used throughout the thesis, with the aim of gauging the climate of opinion around the various environmental issues, and highlighting the link drawn by government between media coverage and the perceived wishes of the electorate. The thesis also makes extensive use of printed sources, particularly in the form of official reports and studies of environmental problems, and contemporary accounts of significant environmental events, such as the *Torrey Canyon* tanker disaster.

In terms of geographical scope, this thesis aims to explain how and why the environment came to play a role in British politics at the national level. Many of the debates explored in the thesis occurred nationally, and prompted changes at the level of central government and new policy discussions within national political parties. However, due to the administrative structure of Britain, there is greater focus on developments in England and Wales than on developments in Scotland. In chapter two, the debate around National Parks initially encompassed England, Wales and Scotland, but while policy in England and Wales was the concern of the MOH and MHLG, in Scotland it was the responsibility of the Scottish Office. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act led to the establishment of National Parks in England and Wales, but it did not cover Scotland, and National Parks were not introduced north of the border until 2000. Similarly, while the environmental debates of the 1960s discussed in chapter five were UK-wide, the creation of the DOE was only directly applicable to England. Additionally, in chapters three and six there is particular focus on London. It is difficult to judge the extent to which the existence of the problems of air pollution and traffic congestion

in the capital increased their political profile, but it is certainly the case that the involvement of London did not lessen the attention paid to environmental debates. While the problems could also be explored through the lens of regional towns or cities, the centrality of London to chapters three and six serves to underline how environmental politics emerged from issues that had implications for millions of people.

Finally, it must be noted that this is not an international or comparative history of environmental politics. Studies of other national contexts and global histories form part of the historiographical background, but one of the problems with the existing literature, particularly within the social sciences, is that it has sought to provide a globalised explanation for what is perceived to have been a global political development. This thesis acknowledges that environmental politics in Britain developed in parallel to environmental politics in other Western countries, but one of the risks of global history lies in missing the particularities of different national contexts. Environmental politics in Britain had international influences, but it emerged in the peculiar national context of the inter-war and post-war periods, in response to challenges that arose from specific political, social, economic and geographical circumstances. Those circumstances are explored in the following five chapters.

## Chapter Two

### National Parks and Town and Country Planning

In December 1949, Royal Assent was given to the Labour government's National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. Hailed by Lewis Silkin, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, as 'a people's charter for the open air', the act was a highly significant moment in the history of nature conservation and outdoor recreation, giving the state responsibility for 'the preservation and enhancement of natural beauty in England and Wales'. The responsibility was twofold – National Parks were established, administered by a National Parks Commission and intended for public access, and a newly formed Nature Conservancy was charged with administering nature reserves for the purpose of providing 'special opportunities for the study of, and research into, matters relating to the fauna and flora of Great Britain'.<sup>1</sup>

The creation of National Parks followed two decades of discussion and investigation. Two government committees had explored the idea and recommended legislative action. In 1929, the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald established the National Park Committee, chaired by the former Minister of Health, Christopher Addison. The Addison Committee published its report in 1931, in which it advised that a network of National Parks should be established. At the end of the Second World War the Labour government of Clement Attlee set up a second National Parks Committee, chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse. The report of the Hobhouse Committee, published in 1947, provided the basis for the legislation of 1949. In Scotland, a committee chaired by Sir Douglas Ramsey published its findings in 1945, recommending five suitable National Park areas. However, a bill for Scottish

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<sup>1</sup> HC Deb, 31 March 1949, vol. 463, cols. 1462, 1485; *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act*, 1949, secs. 1, 15

National Parks was never brought forward, and it would take until 2000 for them to be introduced north of the border. Parallel to the debate around National Parks, there were also calls to protect the rural landscape by extending the provisions of town planning law, first introduced with the 1909 Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, to the countryside. The first Town and Country Planning Act was passed by the National government in 1932, and additional acts were passed by the wartime coalition in 1944 and the Labour government in 1947. The town and country planning legislation established the principle that ‘amenity’, which served as a broad term for describing the satisfactory character of physical surroundings, should be considered as part of decisions concerning the development of both urban and rural land.<sup>2</sup>

The origins of the National Parks debate can be traced back to the nineteenth century. As John Sheail writes in his international study of the emergence of National Parks, the appeal for such measures in England began with William Wordsworth, who wrote in his 1835 guide to the Lake District that ‘persons of pure taste throughout the whole islands ... testify that they deem the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interests who has an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy’.<sup>3</sup> In Parliament, the first mention of National Parks appears to have been made just over 50 years later, in an 1887 Commons debate on the extension of the railway into Ambleside in the Lake District. Arguing against the railway, Henry Howorth, MP for Salford South, cited the example of the United States, which ‘had engaged to preserve the Yellowstone District absolutely intact from railways or the other vulgarities of modern life, and to preserve it as a great National Park’. Howorth received support from Robert Graham, MP for Lanarkshire

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<sup>2</sup> *Town and Country Planning Act*, 1932, sec. 1; *Town and Country Planning Act*, 1947, secs. 5, 28-31

<sup>3</sup> John Sheail, *Nature's Spectacle: The World's First National Parks and Protected Places* (London, 2010), p. 2

North Western, who suggested that the ‘Ambleside district might be most advantageously bought by the nation and preserved for the people of our great towns as a democratic playground’.<sup>4</sup>

However, while such discussion began in the nineteenth century, concern over the status of the countryside and natural beauty grew more intense during the inter-war period, and became enshrined in law with the legislative measures of the 1940s. This chapter examines the debates of the inter-war and immediate post-war years, and explains why the period saw both the Conservative and Labour parties accept the need for greater state regulation of the rural environment. Whereas existing studies of National Parks have prioritised the technicalities of the legislation, and the work of campaigning organisations in advancing their case, this chapter focuses upon why conventional political actors became convinced of the desirability of such policies. It traces this development through two distinct but related themes. On the one hand, those calling for preservationist measures focused upon the pace and extent of economic development, and its implications for the countryside and rural amenities. Advocates of preservation argued that, without measures to control the expansion of towns and the exploitation of the land by industry, the British landscape risked being lost to future generations. Alongside this argument, the case for National Parks was also made on the basis of public health. Just as the moral reformers of the late-nineteenth century had argued that impoverished workers needed access to clean outdoor space, advocates of National Parks in the inter-war years contended that preservation of the countryside would have significant health benefits for the urban population. While the two arguments stemmed from alarm at urban trends and the pace of industrial development, and overlapped in numerous respects, they did not

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<sup>4</sup> HC Deb, 17 February 1887, vol. 310, cols. 1737, 1745-46



represent identical visions of how and why the landscape should be preserved, and they shaped the eventual political measures in different ways.

It is also necessary to set National Parks and town and country planning in their broader social and political context. The legislation of the 1940s coincided with the extension of governmental authority into other areas of national life, and the willingness of both main parties to use state power in the interests of public welfare would help to shape the development of environmental politics in subsequent decades. However, we should not overemphasise the existence of a political consensus in the 1940s. While significant agreement did emerge around the need for greater centralised planning of town and country, and the preservation of the countryside through National Parks, close examination of the debates reveals that a more contested politics lay beneath the common ground. Crucially, actors on the left and right of British politics advocated the policies for very different reasons – there was agreement on the need to protect the shrinking countryside from the risks posed by continuing economic development, but Conservatives tied this to the importance of defending the interests of landowners, while Labour politicians emphasised the social democratic merits of planning and National Parks.

The discussion of National Parks and town and country planning in this opening central chapter introduces some key themes that will be present throughout this thesis. As will be discussed in the following section, while National Parks and town and country planning were policies designed to protect the rural landscape from on going urban and industrial development, they did not have their roots in a desire to curb development, and they should not be seen as a manifestation of an ‘anti-industrial’ spirit. The desire to reconcile progress and preservation, identified by David Matless in the work of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England

(CPRE), was present outside of campaigning organisations, and came to define parliamentary discussion and government policy on the conservation of the countryside.<sup>5</sup> This desire combined with the aim of enhancing the public experience of modernity through the provision of a healthy and amenable environment, and both themes can be found in the cases examined in later chapters, including clean air policy and the search for a solution to the problem of traffic in towns. Additionally, National Parks and town and country planning set the precedent for the post-war increase in state responsibility for the environment, a process that would continue over the period explored in the remainder of this thesis. It should also be noted that National Parks underlined clear limits to environmental protection, particularly when it clashed with dominant political priorities, and this would become increasingly apparent in the years that followed the passage of the 1949 Act.

In demonstrating how and why National Parks and town and country planning legislation was developed and passed in the 1930s and 1940s, this chapter draws on a rich array of sources. The government National Parks committees of 1929-31 (chaired by Addison) and 1945-47 (chaired by Hobhouse) produced extensive documents, all of which are available in the National Archives, alongside a wide range of documents relating to government discussion of and correspondence around National Parks and town and country planning. National Parks also receive extensive coverage in the archives of the CPRE, which established a Standing Committee on National Parks in the 1930s, bringing together numerous campaigning organisations to advocate for the creation of National Parks. The documents of the CPRE and the Standing Committee are held at the Museum of English Rural Life in Reading. The chapter also makes use of government reports, parliamentary debates,

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<sup>5</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), p. 14, 25

newspaper sources and books published by preservationist figures during the inter-war and post-war periods.

### **The rationalisation of development**

The argument that the Industrial Revolution had proved destructive to the British countryside was integral to the early growth of environmental politics, contributing to the formation of the Commons, Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society (1865) and the National Trust (1895), and to the founding of the Garden City Association in 1899, with its declaration ‘that the continual growth of our large cities and the decline of population in country districts is an unhealthy sign’.<sup>6</sup> The growth of such organisations represented early success for the preservationist cause, but this did not dampen concern around the impact of expanding industrial and urban centres, and arguments intensified during the inter-war decades. The best-known voice warning of the threat to the countryside in the 1920s was the architect Clough Williams-Ellis, whose 1928 book *England and the Octopus* offered an acerbic critique of the destructive impact of industrial and urban expansion. Williams-Ellis wrote that the Industrial Revolution had ushered in an ‘age of stupid exploitation’ whose impact had worsened in the years following the First World War, and argued that state action was required, because ‘if a Government has one function above all others, surely it is to protect the natural heritage and rights of its future citizens against the infringements of selfish squanderers in our present time’.<sup>7</sup>

Williams-Ellis’s concern that the situation had become critical in the 1920s is borne out in statistics, which indicate that, in spite of the economic difficulties of the inter-war period, industrial and urban development was accelerating. Over 4,000,000 new

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<sup>6</sup> Dennis Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns: Campaigning for Town and Country Planning, 1899-1946* (Oxford, 1991), p. 1

<sup>7</sup> Clough Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus* (Glasgow, 1928), pp. 12, 15, 101

houses were built between the wars, while the number of private cars on Britain's growing road network rose from 110,000 to 2,300,000, opening the countryside to millions of new residents and visitors.<sup>8</sup> It was against this background that the preservation of the countryside began to play a more prominent role in British political discourse. In 1929 the Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald appointed the first National Park Committee under Addison, and it was given the following terms of reference:

[To] consider and report if it is desirable and feasible to establish one or more National Parks in Great Britain with a view to the preservation of natural characteristics including flora and fauna, and to the improvement of recreational facilities for the people.<sup>9</sup>

At the first meeting of the Committee there was an immediate recognition that the relatively small size of Britain posed particular challenges for preservation. While the term 'National Park' had been borrowed from the United States and Canada, it was noted that Britain could not hope to set aside the kind of large reserves that were possible across the Atlantic.<sup>10</sup> In the opinion of the Conservative peer Lord Bledisloe, this served to underline the need for protection. Destruction was 'proceeding apace and as industry expanded into the country the process would be accelerated'.<sup>11</sup> This view was echoed in a letter to the Committee from John Bailey and J.H. Hamer of the National Trust. Welcoming the Committee's appointment, Bailey and Hamer suggested that 'no Prime Minister would have dreamed of appointing such a Committee thirty years ago', something that was 'proof at once of

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<sup>8</sup> John Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 3, 9

<sup>9</sup> National Park Committee, *Report of the National Park Committee* (Cmd. 3851, 1931), p. 1

<sup>10</sup> The National Archives (TNA): HLG 52/717 National Park Committee, Minutes of Meetings (1929-31), Minutes of First Meeting, 10 October 1929

<sup>11</sup> TNA: HLG 52/717, Minutes of Second Meeting, 4 November 1929

the extent of an evil and the urgency of the public demand for a remedy'. The countryside, the letter continued, was

being every year more and more rapidly destroyed or disfigured beyond recognition. The process of urbanisation which has been going on for a century and a half has become much more rapid in the last 20 or 30 years. The motor car has enormously extended the possibilities of living in the country for those whose business lies in the town. ... The nation itself, which through its chief spokesmen, is always deploring these irremediable losses, is itself by its public action, one of their chief causes.<sup>12</sup>

The sense of urgency was reiterated in the Addison Committee's final report. Recommending that a system of National Parks should be established in Britain, the report pointed to the 'small, densely populated and highly developed' character of the country, and noted that

these considerations emphasise the need of adequate measures for preserving the countryside, and this need is accentuated by the rapid progress of urbanisation, the extension of transport facilities, changes in land ownership, and other modern developments.<sup>13</sup>

The report concluded that the measures were 'necessary if the present generation is to escape the charge that in a short sighted pursuit of its immediate ends it has squandered a noble heritage'.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time as the Addison Committee was carrying out its investigation into National Parks, debate in Parliament revealed that there was cross-party concern

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<sup>12</sup> TNA: WORK 16/853 National Park Committee (1929), Letter from John Bailey and J.H. Hamer of the National Trust, 16 December 1929

<sup>13</sup> Cmd. 3851, p. 39

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 43

around the impact of development on the rural landscape. In 1930 the Conservative MP Sir Edward Hilton Young introduced a private Rural Amenities Bill with the aim of securing wider powers to safeguard the British countryside. In a lengthy Commons debate, members on both sides of the House emphasised the extent of the threat to the rural landscape. Hilton Young said that ‘the process of the destruction of the beauty and amenities of the countryside’ had ‘more rapidly approached a crisis’ since the end of the First World War, while Labour’s Philip Noel-Baker argued that ‘unless something drastic and immediate is done, future generations will be without the heritage we have had’.<sup>15</sup> In the view of John Buchan, Unionist member for the Scottish Universities, the crisis Hilton Young identified could not have become more urgent:

In our now highly industrialised country, where modern means of transport allow the people to access what a generation ago were the most retired corners in the land, in a society like this, some conscious expenditure of effort is required to preserve our rural beauty. I believe that our countrymen are at last awake to their heritage, and desire to preserve it; but they have awakened only just in time. Another generation or two of apathy, and rural England would have been no more.<sup>16</sup>

In proposing action to safeguard the countryside, Hilton Young stressed that he ‘had no thought, no shadow of a thought, of the arrestation [sic.] of development’. Here we see a reflection in Parliament of the ‘planner-preservationist’ philosophy that Matless attributes to the CPRE. Hilton Young argued that advocates of preservation could ‘assist development by bringing to bear a reasonable measure of forethought, in order to make sure that the development shall take place with sympathy for all that

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<sup>15</sup> HC Deb, 21 February 1930, vol. 235, cols. 1747-49, 1792-3

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., cols. 1821-22

is best in the country's life, and not one side of it only'.<sup>17</sup> It was an approach neatly summed up by the Liberal MP Herbert Samuel, who borrowed from the language of inter-war industrial planning to state that what Hilton Young was proposing was 'the rationalisation of development'. 'What seems to me to be needed,' Samuel explained, 'is to introduce the idea of the Plan, the conscious action of society to get rid of evils and to rationalise its own development'.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of rationalising development proved popular with both Labour and Conservative politicians in the 1930s. While Hilton Young's private member's bill did not become law, it received sufficient support in principle from the Labour administration to prompt the introduction of a Town and Country Planning Bill in the spring of 1931. Following the collapse of the Labour government in August 1931, a new Town and Country Planning Bill was introduced in early 1932. It was steered through parliament by Hilton Young, who was by then Minister of Health in the National government, and it became law in 1932. While the legislation was permissive rather than prescriptive, giving local authorities the power to voluntarily produce development plans for town and country, it nevertheless represented a forward step for planning, and a widening of the scope of state responsibility for the protection of the countryside. For the first time, the securing of rural 'amenity' and the preservation of 'places of natural interest or beauty' were established as principles of national planning policy.<sup>19</sup>

However, while advances were made in town and country planning, National Park proposals were shelved amid economic depression, and advocates of the measures continued to lobby for them throughout the 1930s and into the Second World War.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., cols. 1748

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., cols. 1822

<sup>19</sup> *Town and Country Planning Act*, 1932, sec. 1

During this time, the rationalisation of development remained at the heart of the debate. Leading a deputation from the CPRE's Standing Committee on National Parks to the Ministry of Health in March 1937, E.N. Buxton explained that the Committee were not 'fanatical idealists who will have their own scheme, and no other', but rather 'practical men' who recognised the balance that had to be struck in the preservation of the countryside. 'We accept the need of building new things on old foundations and a gradual process of development,' Buxton said, 'but there should be a national plan for all this.'<sup>20</sup> While the campaigners did not wish to halt development, they did contend that preservation should receive increased consideration. In the foreword to a Standing Committee pamphlet published in 1938, the historian G.M. Trevelyan argued that the time had come for society to reassess its priorities:

[Science] and machinery have now armed [man] with weapons that will be his own making or undoing, as he chooses to use them; at present he is destroying natural beauty apace in the ordinary course of business and economy. Therefore, unless he now will be at pains to make rules for the preservation of natural beauty, unless he consciously protects it at the partial expense of some of his other greedy activities, he will cut off his own spiritual supplies, and leave his descendants a helpless prey for ever to the base materialism of mean and vulgar sights.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond Trevelyan's impassioned foreword, the pamphlet revealed that the Standing Committee were realistic in their expectations. The pamphlet acknowledged the wide range of 'legitimate claimants' upon the land in Britain – including housing, roads,

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<sup>20</sup> Museum of English Rural Life (MERL), Council for the Preservation of Rural England (SR CPRE), C/1/102/10 Standing Committee on National Parks (1936-37), Colonel E.N. Buxton's Speech on the Occasion of the Deputation to the Ministry of Health, 15 March 1937

<sup>21</sup> Standing Committee on National Parks, *The Case for National Parks in Great Britain* (London, 1938), pp. 1-2



electric power schemes, military training, mining, quarrying and forestry – and asked for preservation to be considered alongside those claims. In the view of the pamphlet's authors, there was 'an urgent need of a national policy for conserving the whole and allocating it on a comprehensive plan', according to the 'balanced interests of the nation'.<sup>22</sup> The emphasis on balance tells us much about the tactical considerations of the CPRE and its allies in campaigning for National Parks. While Matless is correct to identify the modern, 'planner-preservationist' approach of the campaigners, it is clear that there was a Romantic inflection to their conceptualisation of the English countryside in terms of heritage and the spiritual value of the landscape. For a figure such as Trevelyan, there was a deeper purpose to preservation beyond the straightforward protection of the land from development. However, if the Standing Committee were to make a successful political case, it would be necessary to present National Parks as a pragmatic and achievable policy. Heritage and moral good may have appealed to the campaigners, but if preservation were to be sold to government, it would have to fit alongside more pressing political priorities.

The tactics of the campaigners are evident in their correspondence. Writing to Viscount Ullswater to reassure him that a National Park in the Lake District would not intrude upon his interests, the Standing Committee's secretary, H.G. Griffin, stated that there was 'no question of excluding or curtailing rural industries in National Park areas'. While noting that the Standing Committee would not wish to see 'alien industries' established in National Parks, Griffin also acknowledged that it would be 'impossible, supposing for example oil were discovered in a National Park area, to prevent it from being worked, and I should not imagine that anyone would

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 3

attempt to do so'.<sup>23</sup> Throughout their campaign, the Standing Committee worked to emphasise that their ideas were reasonable, and would not undermine the nation's economic development. 'The proposal for National Parks was not put forward by faddists or cranks,' the Standing Committee's chairman Norman Birkett told an audience in June 1938, 'but was sponsored by reasonable people in all walks of life.'<sup>24</sup> This position was welcomed by the naturalist Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald, who praised the CPRE for recognising that, while 'preservation is, of course, essential', development 'is not only inevitable, but desirable'.<sup>25</sup>

While National Park areas would be protected on account of their natural beauty, proponents frequently stressed that such protection would not undermine the economic interests of those living within the Parks. As a CPRE policy document outlined in 1938, it was not the intention to freeze National Park areas in time:

Preservation is not a passive but an active policy, which must continue to correct abuses and encourage a continuous and beneficial balance between natural forces, wild life, agriculture and human recreation. A National Park is not a sterilised museum specimen, but a living organism which must be given continual health to survive in a conflicting and ever changing environment.<sup>26</sup>

By creating National Parks, the CPRE argued that the government could fulfil a number of objectives. The rural environment was not viewed as a relic that could be sealed off from development, but rather as a space that was continually shaped by both 'natural' and social forces. The conservation of the landscape and wild life was one purpose of National Parks, but that could occur alongside the fulfilment of more

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<sup>23</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/13 Standing Committee on National Parks (1938), Letter from HG Griffin to Viscount Ullswater, 6 July 1938

<sup>24</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/13, Notes on Mr Norman Birkett's Speech, 30 June 1938

<sup>25</sup> *The Field*, 12 November 1938

<sup>26</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/12 Standing Committee on National Parks (1937-38), CPRE and CPRW: National Parks Standing Committee, 20 January 1938

functional, social ends. As Birkett explained in December 1944, Britain's relatively small size meant that the policy needed to be approached differently than in the United States or Canada, where the intention had been to preserve vast areas and keep them largely free from development. 'There is no suggestion,' Birkett wrote, 'that any National Park should become a museum piece of natural beauty. National Parks must be a part of "farming England" and must be farmed better.' It was important to recognise that human activity had played its part in shaping what was considered to be 'natural' beauty. 'For the colours and texture of it, the sudden contrasts of the civilised and the wild, are made by man, who mixes his labour with the earth and creates the intricate pattern of its beauty.'<sup>27</sup>

The importance of human activity was emphasised by the architect John Dower, a long-time campaigner for National Parks who was asked to carry out an investigation into the practicalities of the policy while employed as a civil servant at the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1943. In his report, published in 1945, Dower pointed out that the creation of National Parks could not only involve negative and restrictive measures for the protection of the landscape.<sup>28</sup> While heavy industry should be excluded from the areas, unless the national interest was at stake and no alternative could be found, rural industries, particularly agriculture, should not be restricted:

Almost everywhere, save on the rock summits, faces and screes of mountains and on the peat-hag tops of high moorlands, the landscape to be preserved is the joint product of nature and of human use over many generations; it

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<sup>27</sup> TNA: HLG 92/51 Standing Committee on National Parks of the Councils for the Preservation of Rural England and Wales: Miscellaneous Correspondence (1941-48), Memorandum on National Parks by the Standing Committee on National Parks, December 1944

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *National Parks in England and Wales: Report by John Dower* (Cmd. 6628, 1945), p. 17

cannot be preserved in anything like its present aspect unless that human use is kept fully going.<sup>29</sup>

Dower's proposals provided the basis for the deliberations of the second National Parks Committee under Hobhouse, and in its final report the Committee emphasised the need to strike a balance between development and preservation. It stressed that England and Wales could not hope to emulate the great National Parks of America or Africa. 'Instead,' the report pointed out, 'we are dealing with a closely populated and highly developed country, where almost every acre of land is used in some degree for the economic needs of man.'<sup>30</sup> In the view of the Committee, this only served to underline the urgency of taking action. The time had come 'to ensure that some at least of the extensive areas of beautiful and wild country in England and Wales are protected as part of the national heritage', and that such considerations 'carry due weight in the inevitable competition with more utilitarian, and sometimes more powerful, claims to the use and development of land'. In line with the Dower report, the Hobhouse Committee argued that 'National Parks must not be sterilised as museum specimens'. Instead, 'farming and essential rural industries must flourish, unhampered by unnecessary controls or restrictions'.<sup>31</sup> The aim, the report later stated, should be to achieve a new balance between economic development and the preservation of the countryside:

[In] countries so closely developed as England and Wales man is himself the most powerful agent in disturbing the natural balance and in changing the face of nature for his own ends. These ends have in the past been largely utilitarian, and the means used to achieve them not always wise or far sighted.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Report of the National Parks Committee (England and Wales)* (Cmd. 7121, 1947), p. 7

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 8

It must be an essential purpose of National Park policy to harmonise man's material needs with the protection of natural beauty.<sup>32</sup>

However, the rationalisation of development was not the only justification offered for National Parks. Alongside that argument, the other primary justification lay in the potential benefits to the public of outdoor recreation, particularly for urban residents forced to endure the conditions of crowded towns and cities. In many respects, the public health and leisure argument complemented the case for rationalising development, but, as we shall see, the two did not always fit comfortably together. Modern life had given rise to a case for protecting the countryside, but it had also equipped large numbers of people with the means to visit rural areas, and National Parks policy necessarily required compromise between the two aims.

### **Public health and recreation**

While the nineteenth-century concern around urban squalor and sanitation eased in the twentieth century, there remained a widespread view that life in towns and cities had a negative impact upon the moral and physical health of the population, and as interest grew in the preservation of the countryside in the inter-war period, fuelled by the further expansion of urban centres, the implications for public health came to play a significant role in the ensuing campaigns and debates.<sup>33</sup> An early advocate of National Parks was the Conservative peer Lord Bledisloe, who captured the interest of Stanley Baldwin in 1928 with his argument that the creation of Parks would be to the 'benefit of the tired brain workers of the country'.<sup>34</sup> While this suggested a concern for lower-middle-class office clerks rather than manual workers, Bledisloe

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 60

<sup>33</sup> On debates around urban conditions and public health in the inter-war period, see Greta Jones, *Social Hygiene in Twentieth Century Britain* (London, 1986)

<sup>34</sup> TNA: WORK 16/852 Forest of Dean: Proposal to Convert into a National Park (1929), Letter from Lord Bledisloe to the Prime Minister, 20 September 1928

felt confident in selling his proposal to Labour when the party took office in 1929, telling the First Commissioner of Works George Lansbury that he could not ‘conceive of any proposal being put forward by the Labour government which would prove more popular and more conducive to the health of the nation’.<sup>35</sup>

It was Bledisloe’s lobbying that prompted Ramsay MacDonald to set up the first National Park Committee, and the choice of Addison, a medical doctor who had served as the first Minister of Health from 1919 to 1921, as chair was an indication that public health would be at the forefront of the Committee’s deliberations. Outdoor and recreational organisations were invited to submit evidence, and numerous witnesses testified to the potential value of National Parks to public health. Evidence was received from the Ramblers’ Federation of Great Britain, the Camping Clubs of Great Britain and Ireland, the Fell and Rock Climbing Club, and the Cyclists’ Touring Club, all of which emphasised the recreational value of National Parks.<sup>36</sup> This was a view supported by G.W. Cowan, President of the National Union of Teachers, who welcomed the idea on account of the opportunities it would present for the urban poor. ‘The average working man – and woman,’ he explained, ‘is extremely fond of outdoor life and of nature; but unfortunately industrial conditions are against this and life is spent cooped up in narrow, ill-kept and often unsanitary streets.’<sup>37</sup> The Conservative MP Leo Amery argued that it would only be possible to justify the expenditure of state funds on National Parks ‘on the grounds

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<sup>35</sup> TNA: WORK 16/852, Letter from Lord Bledisloe to George Lansbury, First Commissioner of Works, 9 June 1929

<sup>36</sup> TNA: HLG 52/719 National Park Committee Papers (Jan-Mar 1930), Précis of Evidence to be Given to the National Park Committee on Behalf of Organisations Representing Ramblers and Pedestrians, undated

<sup>37</sup> TNA: HLG 52/719, Summary of Evidence to be Submitted by Mr G.W. Cowan, President of the National Union of Teachers, undated

of national health, physical and moral', and for that reason the policy would need to focus upon the recreational benefits of rural conservation.<sup>38</sup>

To a certain extent, public health and the rationalisation of development were complementary motivations for the preservation of the countryside. Industrialisation and urbanisation had brought about both the loss of natural beauty and the crowded and unhealthy conditions of towns and cities, and measures such as National Parks promised both protection of the landscape and the provision of space in which members of the public could enjoy outdoor recreation. However, as quickly became apparent during the deliberations of the first National Park Committee, the two aims were not necessarily easily reconciled. As the British Correlating Committee for the Protection of Nature noted in their evidence to the Addison Committee, if National Parks were to offer recreational opportunities for large numbers of visitors, it would follow that their 'utility for the preservation of fauna and flora is limited'.<sup>39</sup> For some, the problem was not simply the numbers that would visit, but also the types of people. Ioan Gwilym Gibbon, the Ministry of Health's representative on the Committee, suggested that the provision of recreational facilities in National Parks 'would attract undesirables'.<sup>40</sup> The same issue was noted by *The Times*, which questioned how much would be gained in terms of preservation if Parks were 'thrown open to the public, traversed by charabancs, and overrun by holiday makers'.<sup>41</sup>

In the view of Lord Bledisloe, the influx of the public into National Park areas did present problems, but he believed they could be overcome. Currently the public were 'uneducated in what makes for the beauty and serenity of life', but they were not

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<sup>38</sup> TNA: HLG 52/717, Minutes of Seventh Meeting, 16 December 1929

<sup>39</sup> TNA: WORK 16/853, Memorandum on the Preservation of Fauna and Flora submitted by the British Correlating Committee for the Protection of Nature, November 1929

<sup>40</sup> TNA: HLG 52/717, Minutes of 15th meeting, 4 March 1930

<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 10 September 1930

‘uneducable’, and the best form of education would come from having greater contact with nature. It was vital they were given access to rural recreation, because the ‘nerve-strain’ suffered in crowded towns was ‘not always remedied by spending a short annual holiday in the hectic atmosphere of one of our more popular or fashionable holiday resorts’.<sup>42</sup> In his 1929 letter to Lansbury, Bledisloe had pointed out that ‘Margate and Blackpool are the worst remedies for overwork’.<sup>43</sup> Bledisloe’s view was shared by the geographer and preservationist Vaughan Cornish, who suggested that large numbers of visitors would not damage the National Park areas, as long as there was sufficient ‘recreational education of the young’.<sup>44</sup>

In their concerns over the impact that public access could have on rural beauty, some advocates of National Parks betrayed a sense of cultural superiority that at times sat uneasily alongside the claim that their proposals could have great benefits for the nation as a whole. While public health through outdoor leisure was presented as an argument for creating National Parks, not all members of the public were considered welcome to spend their leisure time in the proposed Parks, particularly if they were going to bring with them forms of behaviour perceived as more suited to Blackpool or Margate. Matless notes that preservationist campaigners of the inter-war period, in particular members of the CPRE, promoted an ‘art of right living’ based around concepts of citizenship and ‘anti-citizenship’. Forms of ‘acceptable’ rural recreation, such as walking and cycling, were promoted and portrayed as ‘generating intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual health’, while other forms of behaviour, involving, for example, litter or noise (i.e. behaviour learned through ‘uncultured’ urban life), were

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<sup>42</sup> TNA: WORK 16/853, Address delivered by Lord Bledisloe at the Second National Conference for the Preservation of the Countryside, Manchester, 10 October 1929

<sup>43</sup> TNA: WORK 16/852, Letter from Lord Bledisloe to George Lansbury, First Commissioner of Works, 9 June 1929

<sup>44</sup> TNA: HLG 52/717, Minutes of 5th meeting, 3 December 1929



seen as necessitating re-education or perhaps even exclusion.<sup>45</sup> Matless notes that even John Dower, a committed democrat and advocate of outdoor recreation, expressed a wish to exclude the 'anti-citizen' from National Parks, telling a wartime meeting of the Town Planning Institute that 'those who want to spend their holidays gregariously ... had far better keep away', and that such people would be discouraged from visiting by being denied 'the kinds of facilities they desire'.<sup>46</sup>

However, despite this suspicion of mass visitors, the arguments focused upon public health and recreation moved to the forefront of the case for National Parks during the 1930s. Writing in *Country Life* in May 1936, Clough Williams-Ellis noted that, while he had 'an instinctive, illogical and quite indefensible feeling that seemly architecture and a gracious landscape are sufficient ends in themselves', he had come to realise that it was necessary to take a more 'utilitarian' view, accepting 'that what really matters is that the appreciation and enjoyment of beauty shall be as widely diffused and shared as possible'. Williams-Ellis conceded that this approach had its problems, but argued that they would have to be overcome in order to justify the creation of National Parks:

With the overwhelming mass of our teeming population town-bred, barbarously reared in far other than splendid cities, having had little contact with beauty of any kind and therefore knowing or caring little for it, the introduction is a hazardous one, for people do not always respond appropriately when presented to the hitherto unknown. Yet it is a risk that must be taken. We must perforce put up with the inevitable

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<sup>45</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), pp. 62, 68

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251

misunderstandings and *gaucheries* that will mark the first contacts of the uninitiated with their hitherto unrealised heritage.<sup>47</sup>

By the late 1930s, the health and leisure argument had come to dominate the campaign of the Standing Committee on National Parks. After a meeting with Robert Hudson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, in March 1937, it was noted that Hudson had been ‘clearly favourably disposed’ to the public health argument, and it was suggested that ‘without altering the scale of our proposals in any way, we should take care to emphasise this connection’.<sup>48</sup> This marked an important tactical shift for the CPRE and its allies. As Williams-Ellis acknowledged, while Romantic notions of natural beauty and national heritage were reason enough for dedicated campaigners to support the creation of National Parks, at the political level there was a need to justify the proposal in terms of its implications for public welfare. After meeting Hudson, the Standing Committee realised that government was more likely to listen when National Parks were presented as potentially beneficial to public health. While protection of the landscape continued to play a role, particular emphasis was placed on the recreational value of National Parks, and the Standing Committee invited Lord Horder, a medical doctor and chair of the National Fitness Council, to speak in support of the policy.<sup>49</sup>

As the campaign moved into wartime, and further investigations were launched into the possibility of creating National Parks, public health remained at the centre of discussions. Writing to Lord Portal, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Works and Planning, in May 1942, William Jowitt, the Minister without Portfolio with responsibility for reconstruction, argued that campaigners from the Standing

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<sup>47</sup> *Country Life*, 16 May 1936

<sup>48</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/10, Suggestions for Action Following the Deputation to Mr Hudson, 15 March 1937

<sup>49</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/13 Standing Committee on National Parks (1938), Press Meeting at the Niblett Hall, Inner Temple, 30 June 1938

Committee had made a good case, both for the preservation of the landscape and wildlife, and for ‘the far more important cause of providing the means for public outdoor recreation’.<sup>50</sup> In his 1945 report, Dower emphasised the potential benefits of National Parks to the health of the nation. The ‘holiday and recreational use’ of the Parks, wrote Dower,

should be for people – and especially young people – of every class and from every part of the country, indeed of the world. National Parks are not for any privileged or otherwise restricted section of the population, but for all who care to refresh their minds and spirits and to exercise their bodies in a peaceful setting of natural beauty. Few national purposes are more vital or more rich in the promise of health and happiness than the provision, first, of general and generous opportunity for holidays (by the “holidays with pay” system and otherwise) and, second, of large, open and beautiful tracts of country in which holidays can be freely and inexpensively enjoyed.<sup>51</sup>

When the Hobhouse Committee was appointed later in 1945, it was clear from the outset that health and recreation was at the top of the agenda. In their early meetings, the Committee agreed that it would be necessary to select the National Park areas based on their proximity to large areas of population, in order to provide easy access for urban residents.<sup>52</sup> The Committee took evidence from a wide range of recreational and outdoor organisations, including the Youth Hostels Association (YHA), the Caravan Club, the Holiday Fellowship, the Ramblers Association, and the National Voluntary Youth Organisations. In its submitted evidence to the

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<sup>50</sup> TNA: CAB 117/123 Correspondence on the Establishment of National Parks and Nature Preserves in Post-War Planning (1941-43), Letter from William Jowitt to Lord Portal, 9 May 1942

<sup>51</sup> Cmd. 6628, pp. 13-14

<sup>52</sup> TNA: HLG 93/3 National Parks Committee: Agenda and Minutes of 1st to 4th Meetings (1945), Minutes of the Meetings (3rd Series) Held on Tuesday, 20th November, 1945 and Wednesday 21 November, 1945

Committee, the National Association of Boys' Clubs suggested that National Parks could benefit the 'future welfare' of the nation by helping to raise the fitness of the youth. There was a need to 'counteract the effects of town life', and the provision of National Parks offered a means of achieving this.<sup>53</sup>

That view was reflected in the final report of the Committee, which, while noting the necessity of nature conservation, placed special emphasis on the importance of National Parks for Britain's urban population:

Four-fifths of the population dwell in urban areas, many of them in the smoke-laden atmosphere and amid the ceaseless traffic and bustle of our industrial towns and larger cities. They need the refreshment which is obtainable from the beauty and quietness of unspoilt country.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, while the 'rationalisation of development' and the preservation of the countryside and nature remained central to the National Park proposals, it was clear by the late 1940s that public health and leisure were key concerns. As the two aims were not always complementary, the resulting legislation necessarily required compromise. Development in National Park areas would need to be controlled, but the recreational needs of the public would also have to be catered for. Given that much emphasis was placed by campaigners on public need, it is necessary to examine the social context in which National Parks and town and country planning policy was developed, and to ask whether the lobbying and political discussion of the 1930s and 1940s was reflective of a public appetite for such measures.

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<sup>53</sup> TNA: HLG 93/44 National Parks Committee: Written Evidence from Voluntary Organisations: Accommodation, Rambling, Climbing, Footpaths and Roads (1945-46), Evidence of National Association of Boys' Clubs, 30 April 1946

<sup>54</sup> Cmd. 7121, p. 8

## Social context

It is difficult to determine where the public stood on the question of National Parks. While elite discussions are well documented, evidence of wider public opinion on the subject is much harder to come by. Opinion polling had begun to take place in Britain in the inter-war period, notably through the work of the British Institute of Public Opinion, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, National Parks, and even the wider issue of town and country planning, were not major topics for early polls.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Mass Observation provides a rich source for inter-war and wartime public opinion, but does not address this subject directly.

Looking at the CPRE and governmental documents, it can be seen that National Parks campaigners *believed* that they had the backing of a considerable body of public opinion. In evidence to the Addison Committee in 1929, the National Trust argued that widespread apathy as to the fate of the countryside had ‘largely passed away’, and that the appointment of the National Park Committee was proof that the protection of scenery and the provision of open spaces had ‘now become a public problem’.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in the 1930s, the CPRE and the Standing Committee on National Parks appeared convinced that public opinion was on their side, and expressed bemusement that the government was not paying more attention. Following the deputation to the Ministry of Health in March 1937, the Standing Committee noted that the Ministry ‘seemed ignorant of the very wide public support for National Parks’, and suggested that public interest needed to be better communicated to government through ‘vigorous, clear and reasonably specific

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<sup>55</sup> For polling data from the period, see George H. Gallup (ed.), *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain, 1937-1975* (London, 1976)

<sup>56</sup> TNA: WORK 16/853, Letter from John Bailey and J.H. Hamer of the National Trust, 16 December 1929

propaganda'.<sup>57</sup> By the 1940s, the view that public opinion was in favour of National Parks appears to have been taken up within Whitehall. In a memorandum to the War Cabinet in late April 1945, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, William Morrison, emphasised the 'large and growing popular demand' for National Parks, and recommended that the government should move forward with the proposals.<sup>58</sup>

There is a lack of direct evidence to support such claims of public support, but it is clear that the campaign for National Parks reflected a well-documented trend of the inter-war period. Although it was set up by the CPRE and its sister body, the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales, the Standing Committee on National Parks was an umbrella group comprised of a range of organisations, many of which represented the growing public interest in outdoor recreation. Alongside conservation groups such as the National Trust and the Commons, Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society, members of the Standing Committee included the Camping Club (which had 10,000 members in 1939), the Ramblers' Association, the Youth Hostels Association (YHA, 83,500 members in 1939) and the Cyclists' Touring Club (36,500 members in 1939), as well as motorists' societies such as the Automobile Association (AA) and the Royal Automobile Club (RAC).<sup>59</sup> While we do not know what proportion of the public wished to see the introduction of National Parks, we do know that there were significant numbers interested in the recreational activities that would be available within National Park areas, and that the numbers able to

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<sup>57</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/10, Suggestions for Action Following the Deputation to Mr Hudson, 15 March 1937

<sup>58</sup> TNA: HLG 92/49 Report on National Parks in England and Wales by Mr John Dower: Consideration of Draft and Subsequent Publicity and Policy (1945), Memorandum by the Minister of Town and Country Planning, 26 April 1945

<sup>59</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/13, Standing Committee on National Parks: Brief Statement on Policy, 1936; Matthew Hilton, Nicholas Crowson and Jean-François Mouhot and James McKay, *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain: Charities, Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector Since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2012), p. 18

enjoy holidays in the countryside was increasing as a result of holidays with pay.<sup>60</sup> It is therefore significant that outdoor organisations lobbied heavily for National Parks in the 1930s and 1940s – when organisations such as the Ramblers’ Association, the YHA and the Camping Club made their arguments for National Parks to the Hobhouse Committee after the war, they did so in the belief that they were speaking on behalf of the growing numbers that participated in outdoor recreation, and in doing so strengthened the conviction among policymakers that public health and recreation should be a central purpose of National Parks. While the National Parks may not have come about as a result of direct public demand, they were introduced in response to a *perceived* public demand, arising from the expansion of outdoor recreation in the inter-war years.

However, it is important not to assume that there was an inevitable progression from public interest in outdoor recreation to the protection of rural beauty through the introduction of National Parks. As Peter Mandler argues, the preservationists were far from representative of the cultural mainstream in the inter-war years, and had to work in the face of a ‘resonant language’ of progress. While the period did see rising interest in the preservation of nature, Mandler points out that it also saw widespread enthusiasm for countless ‘modern wonders’, from motor cars and airplanes to radio and cinema screens. It was also the period in which the familiar retail culture of the twentieth century began to take shape, with chains and department stores increasingly lining the high streets of towns and cities.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> On the growth of outdoor recreation in the twentieth century, see Harvey Taylor, *A Claim on the Countryside: A History of the British Outdoor Movement* (Edinburgh, 1997); On the rise of holidays with pay, see Sandra Dawson, ‘Working-class consumers and the campaign for holidays with pay’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2007), pp. 277-305

<sup>61</sup> Peter Mandler, ‘Rethinking the “Powers of Darkness”: an anti-history of the preservation movement in Britain’, in Melanie Hall (ed.), *Towards World Heritage: International Origins of the Preservation Movement 1870-1930* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 221-2, 232, 237

It is in this context that the campaign for National Parks should be seen. The desires of the public were diverse, and often contradictory. There was a wish for access to the outdoors, but that went together with a desire for the suburban housing that preservationists saw as the leading threat to the landscape, the retail and entertainment opportunities of the town, and an electricity supply that would necessitate the erection of pylons through the countryside.<sup>62</sup> Mandler correctly cautions against viewing the history of preservation as a binary contest between a 'good' side, in the form of preservationist campaigners, and a 'bad' side, in the form of agents of economic development.<sup>63</sup> It is more helpful to look for the interplay between development and preservation, and to recognise that many members of the public were unlikely to have held strong feelings in either direction.

Often, development and preservation worked hand in hand. The expansion of leisure was driven by economic development, and this in turn strengthened the demand for the protection of areas of interest to holidaymakers. There is no better illustration of this than the involvement of the AA and the RAC in the campaign for National Parks. Giving joint evidence to the Hobhouse Committee in 1946, the two associations argued that 'we in Britain should keep unspoiled our national heritage of the beautiful country scene, for the enjoyment of all road users who may seek it'.<sup>64</sup> The Chairman of the RAC, J. Sealy Clarke, emphasised that the freedom of 'wheeled transport to enjoy the beauties of these Parks is one of first importance'.<sup>65</sup> With over two million cars on the road, their owners desired spaces in which to drive them, and

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<sup>62</sup> On inter-war debates over the National Grid and the installation of pylons in rural areas, see Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in Inter-War Britain* (Manchester, 1990), esp. chapter 9

<sup>63</sup> Mandler, 'Powers of Darkness', pp. 228

<sup>64</sup> TNA: HLG 93/44, Observations on the Dower Proposal for National Parks, Submitted by the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club, 18 February 1946

<sup>65</sup> TNA: HLG 93/8 National Parks Committee: Miscellaneous Correspondence (1945-46), Letter from J. Sealy Clarke to Lewis Silkin, 25 September 1945



one of the symbols of economic and technological progress was offered as justification for the preservation of the rural landscape.

The campaign for National Parks revealed a multitude of conceptions of the meaning of the rural environment. For some of those associated with the CPRE, the English landscape was understood in Romantic, pastoral terms, and was considered worthy of preservation on account of its status as an integral component of the nation's heritage. Tied to this conception was a view that there was moral and 'spiritual' value in spending time in the countryside, and campaigners varied as to whether they saw all sections of society as capable of appreciating the landscape on that level. Yet alongside the Romantic view, the rural environment was also presented as having practical value as a leisure space, particularly for town and city dwellers in need of rest and recreation. For the wealthy, this was a case of leisure for its own sake, exemplified by the support of the AA and RAC for National Parks, but for poorer sections of the population it was also argued that Parks would have practical health benefits, providing a means for off-setting the risks of living in crowded urban conditions. There were also those that viewed rural preservation not in terms of its potential social advantages, but rather in terms of the opportunities offered for nature conservation. Alongside landscape protection and recreational organisations, the Standing Committee included representatives of organisations such as the Zoological Society and the Wild Plant Conservation Board, for whom National Parks were conceptualised as spaces suitable for the scientific conservation of flora and fauna.<sup>66</sup> Finally, the rural environment was also viewed as a vital economic resource. Agriculture was a key interest, for which National Parks

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<sup>66</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/13 Standing Committee on National Parks: Brief Statement on Policy, 1936

campaigners were keen to express their support, but rural land also continued to offer opportunities for urban and industrial development.

When the Labour government introduced National Parks legislation in 1949, it was necessary to strike a compromise within this complex web of interests. The nature of this compromise is key to understanding the development of environmental policy in the post-war period, and the fact that it was achieved under the Attlee government raises broader questions about the character of post-war British politics.

### **Political context**

Given that National Parks finally became a reality in the late 1940s, it is necessary to interrogate the impact of the Second World War and the role of National Parks in the social democratic project of the post-war Labour government. It is clear that the circumstances of war proved favourable to the cause of National Parks. Within government the shift to a war footing led to an increase in activity throughout Whitehall, a process the nature conservationist and wartime civil servant Max Nicholson later referred to as the 'wartime suspension of the normal British mechanisms for securing inaction'.<sup>67</sup> As is well established, this not only occurred within areas of government crucial to the war effort, but also within departments focused on the nation's post-war prospects. As the Minister of Works from October 1940, Lord Reith assumed responsibility for preparing for post-war reconstruction, and his department proved sympathetic to proposals for National Parks.<sup>68</sup> Reith established two committees that would prove highly influential in the development of town and country planning in the 1940s. A Committee on Compensation and

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<sup>67</sup> Ann MacEwen and Malcolm MacEwen, *National Parks: Conservation or Cosmetics?* (London, 1982), p. 8

<sup>68</sup> Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975), p. 176-77; TNA: HLG 92/51, Minutes of deputation from Standing Committee on National Parks, 6 January 1942

Betterment, chaired by Mr Justice Uthwatt, was tasked with investigating the financial implications of tighter planning regulations, while a Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas under Lord Justice Scott considered the future of the countryside.<sup>69</sup> When the Scott Committee reported in 1942, it stated that ‘the establishment of National Parks in Britain is long overdue’, and advised that ‘the delimitation of the Parks should be undertaken nationally’, with ‘the setting up of a body to control National Parks under the Central Planning Authority’.<sup>70</sup>

In the closing years of the war the Ministry of Town and Country Planning, led by the Conservative minister William Morrison, made it clear that it intended to push forward with plans for National Parks.<sup>71</sup> In June 1945 the National Parks Committee was established under Hobhouse, and asked to work on the assumption that National Parks would be established in England and Wales.<sup>72</sup> Giving the Rede Lecture at Cambridge University in 1945, Norman Birkett felt able to express great optimism for the future of National Parks. ‘The end of the war, Birkett said, was ‘charged with the highest promise for National Parks’. After six years of war there had been ‘a great stirring in men’s minds, a vast quickening in man’s social conscience’, and it was ‘felt that some compensation might be found for so large a calamity, that something nobler should emerge for those who had endured so much’.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, p. 177

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Works and Planning, *Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas* (Cmd. 6378, 1942), p. 59

<sup>71</sup> TNA: HLG 93/56 National Parks Report: Revisions to Relate to White Paper (1944-45), Note from L. Neal to G. Pepler, 24 November 1944; TNA: HLG 92/49, Memorandum by the Minister of Town and Country Planning, 26 April 1945

<sup>72</sup> TNA: HLG 93/1 National Parks Committee: Composition and Terms of Reference (1945-46), Extracts from a Minute from the Secretary of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning to the Minister, 8 June 1945

<sup>73</sup> Norman Birkett, *National Parks and the Countryside* (Cambridge, 1945), p. 15

Such a notion was, of course, at the heart of the Labour Party's manifesto in 1945, and the landslide election of the Attlee government ensured that the advances made by town and country planning would continue in the post-war years. While Labour's manifesto, 'Let Us Face the Future', did not explicitly mention National Parks, it did contain a commitment that 'the State and the local authorities must have wider and speedier powers to acquire land for public purposes wherever the public interest so requires', alongside the assertion that 'national and local authorities should cooperate to enable people to enjoy their leisure to the full, to have opportunities for healthy recreation'.<sup>74</sup> On becoming Minister of Town and Country Planning in August 1945, Lewis Silkin wrote to Hobhouse to ask whether the National Parks Committee's report could be ready as soon as possible, and, while the process did encounter delays, the legislation was introduced within the Attlee government's first term, becoming law at the end of 1949.<sup>75</sup>

Given the developments of wartime and the post-war years, National Parks and the broader objective of town and country planning could be seen as evidence for the emergence of a consensus within British politics during the 1940s. Having stalled in the 1930s, planning moved to the heart of government during the war, with the commissioning of a number of reports into reconstruction and the creation of a new Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1943. At the same time, both Labour and Conservative members of the coalition government showed enthusiasm for the establishment of National Parks, and were working towards the fulfilment of the policy by 1945. This enthusiasm continued under the post-war Labour government, which extended the planning powers of central and local government, and the

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<sup>74</sup> The Labour Party, 'Let Us Face the Future: A Declaration of Labour Policy for the Consideration of the Nation' (1945), <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab45.htm> (accessed 25 May 2015)

<sup>75</sup> TNA: HLG 93/8, Letter from Lewis Silkin to Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 24 August 1945

Ministry of Town and Country Planning under Lewis Silkin actively pursued the creation of National Parks, passing the necessary legislation in 1949.

However, while acknowledging the emergence of cross-party agreement in the inter-war period, and the role of the war in accelerating the passage of preservationist measures, the depth of consensus should not be exaggerated. The issue acquired a different emphasis when approached from left or right, and there were significant disagreements between the Labour and Conservative parties over how much government intervention was required. As noted, both parties had advocated the extension of planning to the countryside while in office in the early 1930s, but when the post-war Labour government introduced a comprehensive Town and Country Planning Bill in 1947, there was widespread opposition on the Conservative benches. Under the proposed legislation, planning permission would be required for all development, and landowners would no longer be automatically entitled to compensation for any refusal of permission to develop their land, as had been the case under the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act. Additionally, any increase in land value owing to development would be subject to a development charge (betterment), a provision Gordon E. Cherry describes as ‘the nationalisation of appreciating land values’.<sup>76</sup> While Silkin hailed the bill as the beginning of ‘a new era in the life of this country, an era in which beauty and culture will play a greater part in the social and economic life than they have ever done before’, a tumultuous Commons debate revealed that there was no comfortable consensus between the parties.<sup>77</sup>

Speaking for the opposition, William Morrison acknowledged that ‘a further measure of Town and Country Planning is desirable’, but objected to Silkin’s bill, arguing that

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<sup>76</sup> Cherry, *Town Planning*, p. 125

<sup>77</sup> HC Deb, 29 January 1947, vol. 432, col. 987

it would make the individual liable to the ‘unpredictable vicissitudes’ of government. The language of the emerging Cold War was evident in Conservative criticism of the bill – in Morrison’s view, while totalitarian states may expect individuals to surrender questions of planning ‘to the wisdom and provision of the Government’, in Britain planning had succeeded when ‘the State has confined itself to general direction’.<sup>78</sup> David Gammans, Conservative MP for Hornsey, pushed this criticism of the bill further. It was, he told the House, ‘a good Bill with a worthy purpose, which will be ruined by political prejudice, spite and arrogance’. While representatives of all parties wanted ‘wide roads, green belts and open spaces’, the compensation and betterment clauses of the bill were not intended to achieve those ends, but rather ‘to destroy the middle class in this country’, because ‘the whole object of Government policy is to turn Great Britain into a land of propertyless proletariat, depending upon the Government for its housing, its shelter, and its very right to live’.<sup>79</sup>

As Cherry notes, while the bill was passed in 1947, the compensation and betterment clauses did not survive the return of the Conservatives to power – they were first amended, and then subsequently abolished by the 1954 Town and Country Planning Act.<sup>80</sup> On National Parks, disagreement was less pronounced, but the parliamentary debates on the policy revealed significant differences in emphasis. The public health aspect of National Parks offers a useful example of the divergent ideological approaches of the two parties. When campaigners realised that the health argument had traction in the late 1930s, they pursued it by tying National Parks to the Conservative-led government’s National Fitness Campaign, which emphasised personal responsibility for health and fitness through diet and recreation, rather than the need for a comprehensive welfare state (in this respect, the campaign for

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., cols. 989-91

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., cols. 1052-53

<sup>80</sup> Cherry, *Town Planning*, pp. 125-26

National Parks mirrored inter-war appeals for greater access to playing fields and green spaces within towns and cities).<sup>81</sup> By contrast, under Labour the issue became tied to the party's wider social democratic project. Introducing the bill in March 1949, Lewis Silkin explained that the government was creating National Parks with the 'direct and specific purpose' of 'seeking to promote happiness for ordinary men and women, and added that such provisions were 'just as much a part of positive health and wellbeing as the building of hospitals or insurance against sickness'.<sup>82</sup>

There was clear cross-party support for National Parks, but Labour and Conservative MPs commended different aspects of the policy. Following Silkin's introduction of the 1949 bill, Barbara Castle, the Labour MP for Blackburn, echoing the radical campaigns for access pursued by ramblers in the 1930s, emphasised the democratic significance of the legislation, noting that it marked 'the end of the disinheritance of the people of this country from enjoyment of the countryside'.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Barbara Ayrton-Gould, Labour MP for Hendon North, praised the bill, stating that it would 'give the people of Britain their heritage of access ... to the most beautiful countryside in the world', while her colleague Billy Hughes, Labour MP for Wolverhampton West, described it as 'a very important step forward in the long struggle of the common people of this country to establish their right to the freedom of their own land'.<sup>84</sup> In their invocation of national heritage, such arguments bore similarities to those of CPRE campaigners in the inter-war years, but in the hands of Labour MPs heritage was stripped of its elitist connotations, and rural preservation was presented as being in the interests of all classes. Access to the countryside was

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<sup>81</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 281, 330

<sup>82</sup> HC Deb, 31 March 1949, vol. 463, cols. 1484-85

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., vol. 463, cols. 1510-14; On the radical rambling campaigns of the 1930s, see Taylor, *Claim on the Countryside*, pp. 258-59

<sup>84</sup> HC Deb, 31 March 1949, vol. 463, cols. 1539, 1556

portrayed as a democratic right, and as such National Parks were viewed as compatible with the political programme of the Attlee government.

Where Labour MPs emphasised the social democratic value of National Parks and pointed to the importance of public access, Conservative members pointed out that countryside interests needed to be protected. Osbert Peake, Conservative MP for Leeds North, praised the bill and the ‘non-party atmosphere’ in which it was debated, but noted that there could not be unrestricted access to the proposed National Park areas ‘without very serious effects on agriculture’. He also suggested that the ‘many people who do not appreciate these areas, who are gregarious and who much prefer the noise of the holiday camp’, should not be encouraged to visit, at least if the proposed Parks were to ‘be handed on unimpaired to succeeding generations’.<sup>85</sup>

William Fletcher-Vane, Conservative MP for Westmorland, told the House that it was unfair to suggest that it was ‘only the Tories and wicked landowners who grumble about the damage done by urban people who walk about the countryside’, and noted that agricultural interests needed to be given priority over the interests of those seeking leisure in open space.<sup>86</sup> That view was supported by Tufton Beamish, Conservative MP for Lewes, who, while noting that the objects of the legislation were ‘entirely worthy’, stated that he was not going to make ‘exaggerated claims’ about ‘setting the people free’, as ‘one has to strike a balance between agricultural interests, without which we cannot live, and allowing people to roam all over the place’.<sup>87</sup>

The approaches of Labour and Conservative MPs in the parliamentary debates highlight the diverse interests that had to be considered in devising National Parks

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<sup>85</sup> HC Deb, 1 April 1949, vol. 463, cols. 1598-99, 1609

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., col. 1621

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., col. 1585



legislation. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949 was designed to balance that range of interests, but, in doing so, arguably failed to please any of them. Preservationist campaigners were certainly not satisfied by the act. The Hobhouse Committee had recommended that a National Parks Commission should be established with executive powers, but the legislation only created a commission with an advisory role. In January 1948, Norman Birkett wrote to Silkin to express disappointment that the Ministry of Town and Country Planning had declined to set up an executive commission.<sup>88</sup> While government did not wish to undermine the planning powers of local authorities, which had been extended by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, the National Parks campaigners argued that an advisory commission would lack the powers to secure the necessary protection of National Park areas, particularly from development by 'Government Departments and Statutory Undertakers'.<sup>89</sup>

In limiting the powers of the National Parks Commission, Silkin pointed out that 'life went on inside our National Parks no less than outside and that must be borne in mind when recommendations were made on what development might or might not be allowed'.<sup>90</sup> As seen in the parliamentary debates on the National Parks Bill, Conservatives emphasised the need to protect agriculture within the proposed Parks, echoing an argument that had long been made with reference to the policy. As both the wartime coalition and the Labour government set about exploring and implementing National Parks legislation in the 1940s, they faced opposition from the Department of Agriculture, which expressed concern that farming interests would be

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<sup>88</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/40 Standing Committee on National Parks: John Dower & Hobhouse Reports on National Parks in England and Wales (1945-48), Letter from Norman Birkett to Lewis Silkin, January 1948

<sup>89</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/40, Note of a meeting between the Minister of Town and Country Planning and a Deputation from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, 3 December 1947

<sup>90</sup> MERL SR CPRE C/1/102/40, Note of a meeting between the Minister of Town and Country Planning and a Deputation from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England, 3 December 1947

undermined. In 1945, the Ministry of Agriculture tried to block the publication of John Dower's report on National Parks on the grounds that it would 'cause much uneasiness among farmers'. When the Hobhouse Committee was appointed, the Ministry insisted that it should include a representative of agricultural interests among its members, and the agriculturalist Sir William Gavin joined the Committee.<sup>91</sup> When the Committee heard evidence from the National Farmers' Union it was told that, while farmers were not opposed to National Parks, 'the interests of all connected with the land and the farming operations themselves within the National Park areas must be protected against interference or interruption'.<sup>92</sup>

A further clash of interests was between nature conservation and public access. From the very beginning of discussions around National Parks in Britain, it had been noted that the two aims could not be easily reconciled, and this was acknowledged with the creation of a sub-committee of the Hobhouse Committee, the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee, chaired by the biologist Julian Huxley. Giving evidence to that Committee, the British Ecological Society argued that the management of nature reserves represented a different concern from the management of National Parks, and argued that a separate body should be established, 'fully competent to take the necessary measures through its scientifically trained staff'.<sup>93</sup> This recommendation was reflected in the final report of the Special Committee, which stated that the government should establish a Biological Service, separate from any National Parks Commission, with 'responsibility for the protection

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<sup>91</sup> TNA: HLG 93/56, Note by John Dower, 29 January 1945

<sup>92</sup> TNA: HLG 93/42 National Parks Committee: Written Evidence from Voluntary Organisations: Planning, Landscape Preservation and Administration (1945-46), Memorandum Submitted by the National Farmers' Union, 30 January 1946

<sup>93</sup> TNA: HLG 93/49 Wild Life Conservation Special Committee: Written Evidence from Voluntary Organisations, (1945-46), Evidence submitted by the British Ecological Society, 14 January 1946

and management of certain sites of special biological, geological, physiographical and other scientific value as National Nature Reserves'.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, if the National Parks Act was the outcome of consensus, it was also the result of compromise. The new National Parks Commission was given the role of designating National Parks (the first would be established in 1951) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales, but would have no permanent staff or executive powers for controlling development within the protected areas. Meanwhile, a Nature Conservancy was established under the Lord President of the Council, with responsibility for protecting 'the flora and fauna of Great Britain', and, unlike the National Parks Commission, the Conservancy was given executive powers for managing National Nature Reserves. Responding to the growth of outdoor recreation and the Labour government's commitment to improving the health of the population, the principle of public access was placed at the heart of the legislation, but the reality fell far short of the unlimited access that outdoor campaigners had long appealed for. Amid concerns among landowners and farmers, the act only provided access rights by agreement or order, whereas the Hobhouse Report had recommended the automatic granting of access to all open land.<sup>95</sup> Local authorities were given the responsibility of managing National Park areas under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and while this gave them the power to restrict private building, it did not allow for the control of agriculture and forestry, or the prevention of government-sponsored industrial developments. Clearly, while the cause of rural preservation had come a long way since National Parks were first proposed in the 1920s, the measures passed in the 1940s did not represent an outright victory for campaigners.

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<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Town and Country Planning, *Conservation of Nature in England and Wales: Report of the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee* (Cmd. 7122, 1946), p. 70

<sup>95</sup> MacEwen and MacEwen, *National Parks*, pp. 18-19

## **Conclusion**

Following the passage of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, the first three National Parks were designated in the Lake District, Snowdonia and the Peak District. While legislation was not passed for Scotland, a further seven National Parks were created in England and Wales by 1957, covering Dartmoor, the Pembrokeshire coast, the North York Moors, the Yorkshire Dales, Exmoor, Northumberland and the Brecon Beacons. Although the powers of the new advisory National Parks Commission did not live up to the expectations of National Parks campaigners, the 1949 Act was, nevertheless, a key moment in the history of environmental politics in Britain. Together with the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, the legislation established the principle that the preservation of the rural landscape, both for the purpose of nature conservation and for public recreation, should be the responsibility of the state.

The debates of the 1930s and 1940s saw the emergence of two themes that would prove to be central to the development of environmental policy during the post-war period. Despite improvements to housing and sanitation since the nineteenth century, concern continued over the risk posed by towns and cities to the wellbeing of their inhabitants, and the argument that National Parks would have a positive impact on public health increased the attractiveness of the policy for both Labour and Conservative governments. While some of the campaigners connected to the CPRE conceptualised the rural landscape in terms of natural heritage and ‘spiritual’ value, such ideas were not sufficient for convincing ministers that the preservation of the countryside was worth the expenditure of public funds, and over the course of the inter-war years campaigners shifted their tactics to emphasise the value of the countryside as a space for healthy recreation. The human-centred character of the

policy was underlined by the frequent use of the term ‘amenity’, which implied that the protection and enhancement of the environment was to be carried out in the interests of the community.

Parallel to public health, the case for conservation rested on the argument that the growth of heavy industry and the expansion of urban centres was destroying the British landscape. That argument had originated in the nineteenth century, as the profound impact of the Industrial Revolution became increasingly apparent, but it gathered pace in the twentieth century, particularly in the inter-war period, when the continued expansion of towns and cities, the growth of suburbs, and the emergence of motorised transport appeared to heighten the threat to the rural landscape. Advocates of town and country planning and National Parks argued that the situation had become critical, and that it needed to be brought under control before the countryside was lost to future generations.

The arguments for National Parks were not, on the whole, framed in opposition to the dominant values of the period. As this thesis argues, the emergence of the environment as a theme of public policy during the inter-war and post-war years was not driven by an ‘anti-industrial’ reaction against economic and technological development. The appeal in the 1930s for the ‘rationalisation of development’ can be seen as a precursor to present-day arguments for ‘sustainable development’, in that it implied a balance between continued economic growth and the preservation of the rural environment. While there was a Romantic inflection to some of the arguments made by the CPRE and its allies, the campaigners were realistic in their aims, and this was reflected in the ‘planner-preservationism’ identified by Matless, which sought to reconcile the protection of the countryside with well-planned development. In numerous ways, the National Parks policy reflected the trends associated with

modernity. The policy was framed to provide for the leisure interests of a population that was gaining increasing access to holidays with pay, and was even intended, in the motor car, to accommodate the users of one of the symbolic developments of the age. For the post-war Labour government, National Parks were a reflection not only of its commitment to raising standards of public health, but also of its wish to democratise access to leisure and bring about a more general improvement in the 'quality of life' for all classes.

Crucially, National Parks and town and country planning reflected a growing willingness of governments to extend the reach of the state, and that trend would continue over the ensuing decades, as is demonstrated in the chapters that follow. The inter-war enthusiasm for various forms of planning, most clearly seen in the ideas of groups of 'middle opinion' such as Political and Economic Planning and the Next Five Years Group, gained one of its fullest expressions in the discipline of town and country planning, which was to move to the centre of political life with the onset of the Second World War. There is no need to overplay the existence of a post-war consensus in British politics, but there is no doubt that both the Labour and Conservative parties emerged from the war with a commitment to interventionist policies. There were important differences of degree and emphasis, but in the field of town and country planning the policies of both parties provided for control over the development of the land.<sup>96</sup>

The events of the 1930s and 1940s set the course of environmental politics in post-war Britain. This thesis gives a central role to conventional political actors, arguing that, when in government, both Labour and the Conservatives were willing to

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<sup>96</sup> Arthur Marwick, 'Middle opinion in the thirties: planning, progress and political "agreement"', *English Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 311 (1964), pp. 285, 294; John Stevenson, 'Planners' moon? The Second World War and the planning movement', in H.L. Smith (ed.), *War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War* (Manchester, 1986), pp. 67, 69

introduce new environmental measures, particularly when there were implications for public welfare. This is illustrated in the next chapter of this thesis, which looks at the Conservative government's introduction of clean air legislation in the 1950s, and in chapter five, which explores the environmental policies of both parties during the 1960s. However, there were clear limits to the saliency of environmental concerns, particularly when they conflicted with the dominant priorities of the post-war period. As chapter four demonstrates, conservation was established as a necessary consideration in policymaking, but it did not carry sufficient weight to override major industrial projects. When the construction of a nuclear power station was proposed in the Snowdonia National Park in the late 1950s, the limits of environmental protection were to become abundantly clear.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Atmospheric Pollution and the 1956 Clean Air Act**

In 1956 the Conservative government of Anthony Eden passed the Clean Air Act, a landmark piece of legislation designed to tackle air pollution in Britain's towns and cities. The act strengthened a number of pre-existing regulations governing emissions from industrial facilities, and, most significantly, introduced for the first time national measures intended to curb smoke created by domestic coal fires. The introduction of clean air legislation came in the aftermath of one of the most severe environmental disasters in modern British history. Between 5 and 9 December 1952, unusual weather conditions and high smoke emissions resulted in London being affected by a smoky fog, or 'smog', that was dramatic even by the standards of a city notorious for such events. In the weeks following the smog, it became clear that it had resulted in significant increases in the city's mortality and morbidity rates, and it was eventually estimated that as many as 4,000 people had died prematurely. Amid media attention and political pressure, a governmental Committee on Air Pollution was established under Sir Hugh Beaver, the former managing director of Guinness, in the summer of 1953, and the Committee's 1954 report provided the basis for the legislation eventually brought forward by the government in 1955.

Just as the previous chapter examined how and why the state came to extend its influence over the preservation of the countryside in the post-war period, this chapter explores the reasons for the government's decision to take action on the quality of the air in Britain's towns and cities during the 1950s. As with National Parks and town and country planning, it is argued that clean air policy was intended as a means for reconciling the demands of a modern, technological economy with the provision of a clean and healthy environment, and this chapter shows how



technical expertise was brought to bear in order to understand the problem and develop a practical solution. This is in line with the picture presented in the existing literature, but this chapter diverges from the historiography by arguing that government played a more active, and less reluctant, role in devising and driving forward clean air policy than it has usually been given credit for. While ministers, particularly the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Harold Macmillan, were not always entirely enthusiastic about taking action, their role was of greater significance than that of the anti-smoke activists credited in existing studies. The chapter places clean air in the political context of the 1950s, and explores how ministers recognised that public expectations of the welfare state, through which government held responsibility for securing the health and material security of its citizens, necessitated action on clean air

Finally, it is argued that action was taken against air pollution because it was successfully established that the policy would be beneficial, rather than detrimental, to Britain's economic development. It would be possible for environmental action to be taken in line with the dominant priorities of post-war British governance. In this respect, there are important continuities with the town and country planning and National Parks policies discussed in chapter two, and with the cases explored in later chapters. As a response to a rural problem, based around questions of preservation, heritage and leisure, the National Park measures differed significantly from clean air, which focused upon the mitigation of risk in towns and cities, but they represented a similar willingness of government to extend the state's regulation of the environment, particularly when policies were framed as compatible with the aims of promoting economic growth and improving public health. As later chapters show, environmental policies gained a successful hearing in the post-war decades when they

converged with those political priorities, and tended to fall by the wayside when they did not. In twentieth-century Britain, the field of environmental policy was the product of technological modernity, formed in line with of the political aim of enhancing the public experience of rising affluence.

This chapter begins with a brief survey of the history of air pollution and efforts to regulate it, particularly during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. It then focuses on the London smog of December 1952, examining how the event unfolded and exploring the reactions of the media, Whitehall officials and elected politicians. Particular attention is paid to the response of the Conservative government, and the question of whether it was reluctant to take action to address the problem. The chapter then explores the work of Beaver's Committee on Air Pollution, particularly the rationale behind its recommendation that the government should introduce comprehensive clean air legislation. The chapter ends by examining the reaction to the Beaver Report, and the political process that led to the eventual passage of legislation in 1956.

The chapter makes use of the extensive range of archival sources relating to the 1952 smog and the Clean Air Act. In the National Archives, the papers of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government cover the response to the smog and the path towards legislation, while the papers of the Beaver Committee provide a thorough record of its work. The chapter also draws on parliamentary debates, which were central to the discussion around air pollution, and on a range of media sources.

## Historical Background

While the literature on air pollution in Britain understandably focuses on events during and after the Industrial Revolution, it is generally noted that the problem of smoke in towns dates back as far as the use of coal as a fuel. The use of sea coal in London prompted complaints in the Middle Ages, and two royal commissions were appointed to investigate the issue in the 1280s.<sup>1</sup> This concern continued into the early modern era, and in 1661 the author and diarist John Evelyn presented King Charles II with a tract entitled *Fumifugium, or the Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoake of London Dissipated*, a document that Luckin describes as ‘an environmental manifesto to combat atmospheric pollution’ and Thorsheim as ‘one of the most famous denunciations of air pollution ever written’.<sup>2</sup> Luckin writes that ‘London probably experienced a heavily soot-laden fog about once every four years’ during the eighteenth century, but Thorsheim notes that attitudes before the nineteenth century were not entirely hostile to man-made smoke.<sup>3</sup> At a time when a leading cause of disease was thought to be ‘miasma’, an airborne contaminant produced by the decomposition of biological material, contemporaries feared fog because it was believed to have originated from swamps in the countryside, and smoke was seen as potentially beneficial because it could rid the air of miasma. The threat to health was seen to come from nature, and man-made processes were viewed as a possible source of protection.<sup>4</sup>

Perceptions of the dichotomy between the natural and the man-made would shift as the impact of industrialisation began to be felt in Britain’s expanding towns and cities. Emissions by the alkali industry, centred in the north west and north east of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Ohio, 2006), p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Bill Luckin, ‘Pollution in the city’, in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Volume III 1840-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 222; Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> Luckin, ‘Pollution in the city’, p. 222

<sup>4</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, pp. 10-11, 16-17

England, and Clydeside in Scotland, prompted a parliamentary campaign led by Lord Derby, and in 1863 the Alkali Act introduced a new system of regulation for the industry.<sup>5</sup> The new Alkali Inspectorate was ‘the first environmental regulatory body in the world’, and its initial mandate to regulate the emission of hydrochloric acid vapours by the alkali industry was gradually widened to include pollutants from other industries, including the production of heavy chemicals.<sup>6</sup> However, the Alkali Act did not apply to pollution caused by the burning of coal, and there were few attempts at the time to limit the emission of smoke from domestic coal fires.

Luckin argues that the commitment to *laissez-faire* economics held back smoke abatement efforts in the Victorian period, but, while concrete action was limited, there were growing calls for the state to address the problem.<sup>7</sup> During the second half of the nineteenth century, a number of campaigning organisations formed, beginning with the Manchester and Salford Noxious Vapours Association in 1876, a group Thorsheim credits with popularising the use of the term ‘air pollution’ in Britain. This was followed by the foundation of the National Smoke Abatement Institution in 1882, the Coal Smoke Abatement Society in 1898, and the Smoke Abatement League of Great Britain in 1909. In 1929, the latter two organisations merged to form the National Smoke Abatement Society (NSAS), which would remain active during the 1950s as the clean air legislation passed through Parliament.<sup>8</sup> Although the smoke problem was not solved in the Victorian period, a number of legislative measures represented the first steps towards concerted state action. The Sanitary Act of 1866 gave local authorities limited powers for prosecuting the owners

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<sup>5</sup> Luckin, ‘Pollution in the city’, p. 223

<sup>6</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 113

<sup>7</sup> Luckin, ‘Pollution in the city’, p. 211

<sup>8</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, pp. 82, 88, 153

of factories with smoky chimneys, and the 1875 Public Health Act contained clauses aimed at tackling the ‘smoke nuisance’.<sup>9</sup>

According to Thorsheim, such early measures to regulate smoke coincided with a shift in ideas, whereby ‘instead of seeing nature as dirty and civilisation as a source of cleanliness, many people began to assume that nature was inherently pure and only became unhealthy as a result of technological processes’.<sup>10</sup> It is this shift that Thorsheim sees as marking the ‘invention’ of pollution in Britain, and he argues that smoke was key to the new understanding. In the second half of the nineteenth century, scientific investigation played a leading role in the identification of coal smoke as a social evil, with the investigations of Rollo Russell, John Aitken, Edward Frankland and Louis Parkes all contributing to an emerging consensus that the ‘yellow fogs’ of London presented a significant danger to public health.<sup>11</sup> A number of severe fogs were linked to raised mortality rates in the city in the final decades of the century, and by the 1890s it is likely that London’s air quality was at the lowest level in its history (a fact that raises the question of why concerted action was taken in the 1950s, when air quality had actually improved, rather than in the nineteenth century).<sup>12</sup>

As the twentieth century began, Mosley argues, coal smoke ‘was widely acknowledged to be a major environmental problem’, with technical specialists and activists drawing attention to ‘blackened buildings, stunted vegetation, begrimed belongings, wasted fuel, diminished sunlight, and high death rates from respiratory

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-14; Stephen Mosley, ‘The home fires: heat, health and atmospheric pollution in Britain, 1900-45’, in Mark Jackson (ed.), *Health and the Modern Home* (London, 2007), p.205

<sup>10</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 19

<sup>11</sup> Peter Thorsheim, ‘Interpreting the London fog disaster of 1952’, in E. Melanie Dupuis (ed.), *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution* (New York, 2004), p. 157

<sup>12</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 128

diseases'.<sup>13</sup> In 1903 the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, a body set up to investigate the reasons for the recruitment crisis during the Boer War, identified the lack of sunlight and fresh air as a reason for the poor physical condition of Britain's urban population, while in 1905 the word 'smog' was coined by the doctor and activist H.A. Des Voex to describe the mixture of smoke and fog that blighted the towns and cities.<sup>14</sup> While industrial processes were producing less smoke than in the nineteenth century, population increase led to a worsening of emissions from domestic fires, with annual coal consumption rising from 60 million tons in 1911 to 189 million tons in 1951. Anti-smoke activists continued to press the issue, and the gas and electricity industries advertised the advantages of new forms of domestic heating during the inter-war years, but by 1938 bituminous coal was responsible for heating 80 per cent of British homes.<sup>15</sup>

During this period, the smoke problem was receiving increasing attention from government. In 1914 a departmental committee was set up under Lord Newton, and when it published its findings in 1921 following the interruption of the war, it established that domestic smoke contributed as much to air pollution as industrial smoke.<sup>16</sup> The Public Health (Smoke Abatement) Act of 1926 gave local authorities the ability to apply to the Ministry of Health for permission to regulate black smoke from factories, but the legislation was not enforced by the Ministry with sufficient zeal, and did not cover domestic smoke. Similarly the Public Health Act of 1936 defined dark industrial smoke as a nuisance, but imposed an insufficient maximum fine of £50, and contained too many loopholes to be effective. After the war the Committee on Domestic Fuel Policy under Lord Simon was asked to consider air

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<sup>13</sup> Mosley, 'The home fires', p. 198

<sup>14</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 30

<sup>15</sup> Mosley, 'The home fires', p. 197

<sup>16</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 129

pollution as part of its investigations and it concluded that action was required to address domestic smoke, both from a public health perspective and in light of the fact that smoke signified the wastage of fuel through insufficient combustion.<sup>17</sup> However, the clean air recommendations of the Simon Committee were shelved, and there is little evidence to suggest that, as the 1950s began, the government had any intention of acting on the smoke pollution problem.

### **The smog of December 1952**

The event that would become known as London's 'Great Smog' began on Friday 5 December 1952, when a thick layer of fog blanketed the capital. Meteorologically, the fog was caused by an unusual combination of conditions – cold temperatures and a lack of wind, together with temperature inversion, whereby cold air close to the ground became trapped under a layer of warmer air, produced a fog that mixed with the city's smoke pollution to become a yellow-black smog. In addition to helping to create the fog, the cold temperatures led to an increase in domestic coal use, and the resulting smoke emissions served to worsen the smog. Thorsheim writes that devices designed to measure air pollution in the city became so full of particulates that they ceased to function, while concentrations of sulphur dioxide reached their highest levels since monitoring had begun in 1932.<sup>18</sup>

Two years later, Dr A.E. Martin of the Ministry of Health would write that the smog of 1952 was an example of how 'a metropolis of eight and a quarter million population can experience a disaster ... without even realising that it had occurred'.<sup>19</sup>

While the smog was later established to have been the cause of several thousand

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<sup>17</sup> Roy Parker, 'The struggle for clean air', in Phoebe Hall, Hilary Land, Roy Parker and Adrian Webb (eds.), *Change, Choice and Conflict in Social Policy* (London, 1975), pp. 371-409, pp. 371-72

<sup>18</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, pp. 161-63

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives (TNA): MH 55/2662 Smog of December 1952: Report by Dr A.E. Martin of Ministry of Health (1954), Mortality and Morbidity During the London Fog of December 1952, 28 July 1954

deaths, Martin argued that, during the days when it actually occurred, there was virtually no awareness that it presented a significant threat to public health. Examination of the press during the week of the fog indicates that, to a large extent, Martin's verdict was correct. The occurrence of such a thick fog attracted significant media attention, but initial coverage largely focused on it as a curiosity and a source of disruption, rather than a danger to health. The leading London newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, reported on the fog as soon as it settled on 5 December, and placed emphasis on the delays caused to train services, as well as the postponement of football fixtures on Saturday 6 December.<sup>20</sup> Coverage in the national press followed a similar pattern. The fog was front-page news in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror* on 6 December, with the *Mirror* reporting that it had 'completely shut down the Thames-side towns Twickenham and Teddington', and caused the closure of Richmond Bridge.<sup>21</sup> In addition to transport chaos, the newspapers were particularly attracted to reports of crimes that took place under the cover of the fog. The *Mirror* reported on handbag snatches that occurred on the first day of the fog, while on 8 December it ran a story headlined 'Cosh gangs strike in the black out', in which Scotland Yard was quoted as describing 5-7 December as 'one of the worst weekends of crime for a long time'.<sup>22</sup> The press also pointed to the economic cost of the disruption, with the *Telegraph* placing a figure of between £5 million and £10 million on the 'stoppage of transport and dislocation of trade', and the *Mirror* suggesting that the smog was costing London £2 million per day.<sup>23</sup>

However, while disruption and crime dominated the press coverage, the potential health impact did not go entirely unnoticed. Aside from lives lost in accidents, the

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<sup>20</sup> *Evening Standard*, 5 December 1952; *Evening Standard*, 6 December 1952

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 6 December 1952; *Daily Mirror*, 6 December 1952

<sup>22</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 6 December 1952; *Daily Mirror*, 8 December 1952

<sup>23</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 1952; *Daily Mirror*, 8 December 1952



first reports of fog-related deaths concerned not people but animals. On 8 December, the newspapers reported on the deaths of 11 prize cattle at the Smithfield Show at Earls Court, with one agricultural worker telling the *Evening Standard*, ‘Cattle can cope with just a clean country fog and may just get a cough, but this smoke in the London fog chokes them.’ In addition to those cows that died or had to be slaughtered, it was reported that ‘others breathing heavily were wrapped in blankets and had damp sacking filters over their nostrils’.<sup>24</sup> By 10 December reports began to emerge of the fog taking the lives of Londoners. The *Evening Standard* wrote that 53 people had died in Croydon, mostly as a result of bronchial problems, and that 24 people had collapsed and died in east London.<sup>25</sup> The *Telegraph* reported that over 100 people had died in the fog, while the *Mirror* went further and stated that it had ‘killed hundreds of elderly people’, and quoted a coroner’s officer from St Pancras as saying, ‘It’s been like dealing with an epidemic.’<sup>26</sup> The fog had not entirely dominated headlines between 5 and 10 December (a gangland trial and television plans for the Queen’s upcoming coronation were among the stories that received greater attention that week), and the health threat had not been at the forefront of the press coverage, but by the time the fog lifted there does appear to have been a growing awareness that, on top of the disruption and the spike in crime, the event had impacted upon the capital’s mortality and morbidity rates. On Friday 12 December the *Evening Standard* reported that during the following week the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, would be asked to set up an inquiry, and the Ministry of Health asked to explain the increased bronchial deaths.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Evening Standard*, 8 December 1952

<sup>25</sup> *Evening Standard*, 10 December 1952

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 1952; *Daily Mirror*, 10 December 1952

<sup>27</sup> *Evening Standard*, 12 December 1952

Whereas early reports placed figures for deaths in the low hundreds, by the end of the following week it was revealed that the impact of the smog had actually been far worse. A number of parliamentary questions challenged the government to discuss the fog, and initially they were met by unremarkable responses. On 16 December, in response to a question by the Labour MP Tom Driberg, the Minister of Health Iain Macleod stated that deaths in London from all causes during the fog week had increased by around 500 compared with the corresponding week in 1951.<sup>28</sup> On 17 December, Driberg asked whether the government would set up an inter-departmental committee 'to inquire into the causes and cure of the London fog', and was told that it would not be happening, as an Atmospheric Pollution Research Committee already existed under the Fuel Research Board.<sup>29</sup> However, when Macleod faced further questions on 18 December, he gave an astonishing answer. Asked about deaths and hospital admissions during the fog, he said that 'the number of deaths from all causes in Greater London during the week ending 13 December was 4,703 compared with 1,852 in the corresponding week of 1951'. In addition, 'the number of hospital admissions arranged by the Emergency Bed Service for the week ending 12 December was 2,007 compared with 917 [in 1951]'. Macleod noted that 'the cold weather had already caused some increase', but conceded that 'a large part of these increases must be attributed to the fog'.<sup>30</sup>

Given that it took the estimated death toll up to almost 3,000 (the figure was of course provisional, and in need of further investigation), Macleod's announcement was a sensational one, a fact acknowledged by the Ministry of Health when it

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<sup>28</sup> HC Deb, 16 December 1952, vol. 509, col. 188W

<sup>29</sup> HC Deb, 17 December 1952, vol. 509, col. 221W

<sup>30</sup> HC Deb, 18 December 1952, vol. 509, col. 237W

described the death rate as ‘spectacular’ in a press release issued on 19 December.<sup>31</sup> The news was picked up in the press, but it should be noted that the level of coverage varied across publications. Somewhat surprisingly, the *Evening Standard* did not report on Macleod’s announcement, while the *Telegraph* only gave it two short paragraphs on its front page.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, of all the leading British newspapers the *Mirror* would become the one most concerned with the air pollution problem after December 1952, and it set the tone for this with a front-page headline on 19 December that declared that ‘The big fog killed 3,000 people’.<sup>33</sup> The *Mirror* reported that the NSAS was planning to ask the government to set up an inquiry, and the organisation did indeed do this in a letter to the Ministry of Health on 31 December, in which it expressed concern about ‘the abnormally serious consequences of the recent London smoke-fog, especially in relation to human health’.<sup>34</sup> The Christmas recess eased parliamentary pressure for the rest of 1952, but there were reports that a number of MPs, including Labour’s Norman Dodds, intended to push for an inquiry when the Commons reconvened in the New Year.<sup>35</sup>

### **The political response**

It became a common perception, both at the time and in the historiography, that the Conservative government was hesitant and even evasive in its response to the air pollution problem after the 1952 smog. Parker describes the government as both apathetic and tardy, and suggests that the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) did not provide any real leadership on clean air. This was due both to a lack of interest and to a

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<sup>31</sup> TNA: MH 58/398 Unusual Incidence of Smog, 5-9 December 1952: Investigations and Reports; General Correspondence (1952-53), Press release, 19 December 1952

<sup>32</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 1952

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 19 December 1952

<sup>34</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Arnold Marsh, General Secretary of National Smoke Abatement Society, to Ministry of Health, 31 December 1952

<sup>35</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 29 December 1952

preoccupation with more politically pressing issues, such as the aim of building 300,000 new houses per year. With the government disinterested, Parker argues that it fell to backbench MPs and representatives of the NSAS to keep the issue alive.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Thorsheim writes that ‘the government attempted to minimise the magnitude of the calamity’, and sought to ‘escape blame’ and ‘avoid being pressured into stricter controls on air pollution’.<sup>37</sup> In Thorsheim’s opinion, it was pressure from the public, the media and Parliament that forced the government into setting up an investigation, and, even then, the Beaver Committee was largely seen as a means of deflecting criticism.<sup>38</sup>

There is certainly much evidence to support this account. From as early as January 1953, the government’s response to the fog attracted criticism both in Parliament and in the press. On 22 January, Marcus Lipton, Labour MP for Brixton, asked Macleod whether the government, in light of the fact that the December fog had brought death ‘on the scale of mass extermination’, would be investigating the issue ‘as a matter of urgent priority’.<sup>39</sup> While Macleod assured Lipton that his department was ‘looking into the matter as a problem of the very greatest urgency’, his answer clearly did not satisfy the whole House, as on 27 January Norman Dodds accused the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Harold Macmillan, of ‘an amazing display of apathy’. Dodds pointed out that ‘last month ... there were literally more people choked to death by air pollution than were killed on the roads in the whole country in 1952’, and asked why a major public inquiry was not being held, given that ‘inquiries are held into air and rail disasters which do not affect so many people’.<sup>40</sup> Such parliamentary criticism coincided with press coverage that presented the smog

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<sup>36</sup> Parker, ‘Struggle for clean air’, pp. 380-81, 393, 407-9

<sup>37</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 165; Thorsheim, ‘Interpreting the London fog disaster’, p. 159

<sup>38</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, pp. 165, 167

<sup>39</sup> HC Deb 22 January 1953, vol. 510, col. 382

<sup>40</sup> HC Deb, 27 January 1953, vol. 510, col. 828

as a major disaster, and air pollution as a problem that required urgent political action. On 23 January the *Evening Standard* published an editorial in which it characterised the smog as the ‘December massacre’, and suggested that ‘the Londoner has a malignant enemy of which he sometimes speaks in terms of misguided affection’. The death toll, it noted, was ‘comparable with the worst month of the Blitz’, and it was therefore imperative that the government ‘should bring all possible scientific resources to the task’.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in its editorial on 31 January the *Manchester Guardian* pointed out that the loss of life was ‘greater than that experienced in the worst week of the cholera epidemic of 1866’, and expressed a hope that ‘perhaps at last it will be appreciated that the social cost in death, disease and extra burdens on doctors and hospitals is great enough to warrant much larger expenditure on prevention’.<sup>42</sup>

Such criticism continued throughout the first half of 1953. On 12 February the government, having suggested in December that its Atmospheric Pollution Research Committee would investigate the smog, was forced into an embarrassing admission. Asked by Lipton to explain what further action the Committee had taken, Arthur Molson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works, responded, ‘None. The Committee is essentially an advisory body concerned with the collection of data on atmospheric pollution.’<sup>43</sup> Lipton again pressed the government on 19 March, asking Macleod whether he realised ‘that the matter is one of considerable urgency’. The Minister replied that he agreed that ‘it is a most important matter’, but added that ‘it

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<sup>41</sup> *Evening Standard*, 23 January 1953

<sup>42</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 31 January 1953

<sup>43</sup> HC Deb, 12 February 1953, vol. 511, col. 75W

is precisely for that reason that, in my view, this sort of scientific investigation ought not to be hurried'.<sup>44</sup>

The most severe parliamentary criticism came on 8 May, when Norman Dodds initiated an adjournment debate on the subject of air pollution. Introducing the debate, Dodds told the House that there was still 'an amazing amount of alarm on the part of the public about the heavy death roll and widespread sickness following the December fogs'. Dodds then went on to suggest that the government's response had worsened the situation:

This alarm has been greatly increased by the amazing, at least outward, apathy of the Government. Most people who have deep feelings about this just cannot understand why there has not been a public inquiry after thousands of people were choked to death during the December fogs. In the case of air and rail disasters, where the death roll may amount to tens and not thousands, as in this case, public inquiries are held because the public wish to be assured that every care is taken to prevent a repetition. Yet there has been no public inquiry at all into the heavy death roll in the December fogs.<sup>45</sup>

Dodds pointed out that the attitude of senior ministers betrayed a lack of concern about the issue, something he highlighted with reference to the *Evening Standard*, which had quoted Macleod as telling guests at a dinner that 'anyone would think fog had only started since I became Minister'. Such apathy did not reflect the public's feelings, as since Dodd had become an MP he had 'never had more correspondence on any subject than I have had on the question of air pollution'. He concluded that the government should set up an exhaustive inquiry into the problem, and suggested

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<sup>44</sup> HC Deb, 19 March 1953, vol. 513, col. 189

<sup>45</sup> HC Deb, 8 May 1953, vol. 515, col. 841

that a permanent body should later be established to ensure the thorough implementation of the inquiry's recommendations.<sup>46</sup> Responding on behalf of the government, Ernest Marples, Parliamentary Secretary to the MHLG, denied the charge of apathy, and pointed out that there were more Conservative than Labour MPs in the chamber for the debate. Air pollution, Marples said, was 'a great evil', and 'its effect on health ... has been of great concern for many years'. While it was 'futile to think that air pollution can be abolished overnight', Marples announced that the government had decided 'to appoint a Committee under an independent chairman, to undertake a comprehensive review of the causes and effects of air pollution, and to consider what further preventive measures are practicable'.<sup>47</sup>

Marples' reply represented the first public announcement of the government's intention to set up the Committee on Air Pollution, which would eventually be chaired by Sir Hugh Beaver. Given that it followed months of criticism, it is unsurprising that the decision has been characterised as one taken by a disinterested government in order to ease public and parliamentary pressure. However, examination of the London smog and its aftermath from the perspective of government departments reveals a more complicated picture. Although there is some evidence of inaction and scepticism on the part of certain actors, the response in Whitehall was far less complacent than is usually suggested in the literature. If leading figures in the Conservative government took their time in responding to the disaster, the same cannot be said of departmental officials. As soon as the fog hit London in December 1952, there was discussion within the MOH on the implications for mortality and morbidity. On 11 December Dr W.H. Bradley, Medical Officer to the Ministry, wrote that the reported rise in unexplained deaths and hospital admissions

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., cols. 842-44, 847; *Evening Standard*, 24 January 1953

<sup>47</sup> HC Deb, 8 May 1953, vol. 515, cols. 850-51

‘made it clear that there was a *prima facie* case for investigation’. The decision was thus taken ‘to initiate rather extensive inquiries immediately, before material and information might be lost’.<sup>48</sup> On 17 December, statistics were circulated within the Ministry, and it was noted that deaths in Greater London relating to bronchitis and pneumonia over the weekend of the fog ‘were greater than ever previously recorded’. The report concluded that the incident had serious implications:

This has been a big show and when the General Register Office figures are published [it] may cause quite a stir. Our impression is that infection has played a negligible part and that the mortality is directly related to the “Smog”. It is not yet safe to conclude that illness and deaths occurred only in people with seriously impaired cardio-respiratory function. People who would ordinarily consider themselves to be reasonably healthy have been seriously infected, or died.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, while it was alleged that government was apathetic in response to the smog incident, it is clear from departmental documents that there was significant concern among officials within the MOH, and efforts were made by mid-December to investigate the matter further. As Thorsheim notes, medical and scientific investigation was crucial to the identification of smog as a significant problem. ‘The ability to “see” the fog of 1952 as a disaster,’ writes Thorsheim, ‘depended crucially on the collection and interpretation of statistical data’.<sup>50</sup> This was a complex process that involved the analysis of data relating to a wide range of medical conditions, and the determination of whether the smog could have played a role in the deaths of patients with pre-existing illnesses (particularly lung or bronchial conditions). The

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<sup>48</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Minute by W.H. Bradley, 11 December 1952

<sup>49</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Report, 17 December 1952

<sup>50</sup> Thorsheim, ‘Interpreting the London fog disaster’, p. 161



initial estimate of 2,851 deaths was revised upwards to approximately 6,000 in January 1953.<sup>51</sup> At one stage, the government's air pollution scientist, E.T. Wilkins, produced an estimate of 8,000, although the government would eventually settle on the lower estimate of approximately 4,000.<sup>52</sup> Whereas Thorsheim downplays the effectiveness of government, it should be recognised that the MOH played a central role in such investigations. By the end of February 1953 a Departmental Committee on Fog Deaths had been established under Professor S.P. Bedson, with the aim of compiling evidence and making 'definite suggestions on the prevention of future incidents'.<sup>53</sup> Expert scientific and medical knowledge, particularly within the MOH, ensured that air pollution was established as a problem that had to be investigated and addressed.

One of the problems for government in the immediate aftermath of the smog was that responsibility was divided between several departments. The MOH was responsible for handling the statistical investigations into mortality and morbidity, and the implications for health policy, but such responsibility as existed for controlling air pollution lay with the MHLG. Additionally, domestic fuel policy was the responsibility of the Ministry of Fuel and Power, which also shared the coordination of pollution research with the Ministry of Works. Parker argues that this division of responsibilities goes some way to explaining 'the delay and the resistance' of the government when it came to addressing the problem.<sup>54</sup> However, the official documents reveal that the various departments were cooperating within weeks of the smog disaster. Officials from the MOH and the MHLG were in touch from early January 1953 and, while there was initially some reluctance within the MHLG to

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<sup>51</sup> HC Deb, 21 January 1953, vol. 510, col. 42W

<sup>52</sup> Thorsheim, 'Interpreting the London fog disaster', p. 163

<sup>53</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Minutes of Meeting of Departmental Committee on Fog Deaths, 24 February 1953

<sup>54</sup> Parker, 'Struggle for clean air', p. 380

accept that the fog was definitely responsible for the deaths (there were suggestions that the cold and damp weather should be considered as a cause), by early February the two departments were working together on the issue.<sup>55</sup> On 5 February, S.G.G. Wilkinson of the MHLG described his department as ‘acutely interested in the Ministry of Health’s investigations into the causes of the deaths which occurred during the fog’, and wrote that ‘we have clearly got to intensify our efforts, if we can, to abate smoke’.<sup>56</sup>

By the end of February there was close cooperation between the relevant departments. On 24 February a meeting was convened by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, attended by officials from the MOH and the MHLG. The chairman, Sir Harold Roxbee Cox, explained that the meeting had been arranged because of ‘the anxiety of the Ministry of Fuel and Power that the problem of atmospheric pollution should be tackled with drive and coordination’, and it was agreed by all present that the problem ‘merited a vigorous and concerted attack’, involving ‘more effective machinery’ and the ‘formation of some body actively to pursue the reduction of pollution’. The meeting appears to have been the first time that an ‘Inter-departmental Committee with comprehensive terms of reference’ was suggested, and the MHLG agreed to take the next steps towards the establishment of such a committee.<sup>57</sup> Although it would be some months before the Beaver Committee was actually set up, it is clear that the departments were paying attention to the issue during the spring of 1953. The MHLG and MOH were in touch throughout March and April, with the MHLG arguing that there was ‘an urgent need for a

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<sup>55</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79 Committee on Air Pollution: Constitution (1953), Letter from S.G.G. Wilkinson to Michael Reed, 1 January 1953; TNA: HLG 55/79, Letter from S.G.G. Wilkinson to I.G. Evans, 13 February 1953

<sup>56</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Minute from S.G.G. Wilkinson to Dr N.R. Beattie, 5 February 1953

<sup>57</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Minutes of a Meeting for Preliminary Consideration of the Possibility of Further Action to Reduce Atmospheric Pollution, 24 February 1953

comprehensive review of the problem'.<sup>58</sup> At the end of April, the MHLG convened an inter-departmental meeting at which it noted that 'the problem of air pollution had assumed increased importance', and suggested the establishment of an investigative committee under an independent chairman.<sup>59</sup> This was the proposal announced in Parliament on 8 May, and it would lead to the formation of the Beaver Committee in July.

As the government departments discussed the issue during the first half of 1953, one of the recurring themes was the need to satisfy public opinion around the problem of air pollution. This was particularly emphasised by officials from the MHLG, who argued that the formation of a committee 'would help to allay public disquiet about the dangers of fog'.<sup>60</sup> They also requested that the committee should produce an interim report in order to reassure the public about 'what has been and is being done'.<sup>61</sup> This attentiveness to public feeling was based less on concrete measurements of opinion (the Gallup polls, for example, asked no questions about air pollution during this period) than on a more nebulous sense of what the public wanted, gleaned in part from criticism of the government in Parliament and the press. Yet, vague as it may have been, the perception of public opinion loomed large over the decision-making process. As the winter of 1953 approached, there was concern at Cabinet level that another major smog could prove a source of public panic, and ministers discussed how best to allay such fears. For Macmillan, the key was to show the public that the government was taking action. When the Beaver Committee submitted its interim report in the autumn of 1953, and the Cabinet had to decide

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<sup>58</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Letter from H. Symon to I.F. Armer, 28 March 1953

<sup>59</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Notes of Meeting on Air Pollution, 23 April 1953

<sup>60</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Letter from H. Symon to I.F. Armer, 28 March 1953

<sup>61</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Minute by I.F. Armer, 24 April 1953

how to respond, Macmillan advised his colleagues that the establishment of a Cabinet committee would help to satisfy public opinion:

Today everybody expects the Government to solve every problem. It is a symptom of the Welfare State. Governments are judged by their apparent ability to take the initiative in matters like 'smog'. For some reason or another, 'smog' has captured the imagination of the press and the people. All yesterday my Public Relations Officer was rang up with this question, "What is the Government going to do about the 'smog'? Ridiculous as it appears at first sight, I would suggest that we form a Committee. Committees are the *oriflamme*<sup>62</sup> of democracy. ... We cannot do very much, but we can seem to be very busy – and that is half the battle nowadays.<sup>63</sup>

Macmillan expressed a similar view in a letter to the Home Secretary, David Maxwell Fyfe. 'I believe,' he wrote, 'that this is one of those things, like the floods, by which the efficiency of the Government is judged. There is nothing very much that we can do, but we can look as if we were doing it'.<sup>64</sup> While his opinion prevailed and a Cabinet committee was appointed to consider the interim Beaver Report, Macmillan did meet with some opposition from Macleod, who argued that such a committee would 'just excite press interest in the problem'.<sup>65</sup> He made a similar argument with reference to the prescription of 'smog masks' on the National Health Service, which Macmillan also advocated keenly ahead of the winter of 1953. Whereas Macmillan

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<sup>62</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines *oriflamme* as "The sacred banner of St Denis, of red or orange-red silk, which from the 12th to the 15th centuries the kings of France used to receive from the abbot of Saint-Denis on setting out for war". It can also be defined as 'an object, principle, or ideal that serves as a rallying point in a struggle'. In using it to describe a Cabinet committee, it is likely Macmillan was pointing out that such a committee would represent a symbolic gesture from the government in response to air pollution, even if it would make little practical difference to the problem.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: PREM 11/952 Use of Smog Masks; Setting up of Committee to Co-ordinate Activities of Various Departments Concerned with the Abatement of Fog (1953-55), Cabinet Memorandum by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, 18 November 1953

<sup>64</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Harold Macmillan to David Maxwell Fyfe, 17 November 1953

<sup>65</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Iain Macleod to David Maxwell Fyfe, 18 November 1953

was ‘strongly of the view that we ought to issue masks through the Health Service to those who might most benefit’, largely due to the effect the measure could have in reassuring the public, Macleod wrote to the Prime Minister to point out that the masks would have little practical benefit, and argued that there was a risk of exciting rather than allaying public panic.<sup>66</sup> In the end he backed down, and conceded that, while the masks would be little more than a symbolic gesture, prescribing them would be worthwhile as the government stood ‘in very great danger of criticism if last year’s tragedy occurs again and we have done nothing about it’.<sup>67</sup>

Such internal governmental discussions reveal a great deal about the path towards firmer regulation of atmospheric pollution. Macmillan’s comments and actions are particularly illuminating. He displayed scepticism towards the post-war welfare state (i.e. the responsibility of government for protecting the physical health and material well being of all citizens, exemplified by the reform of the Attlee governments), complaining that the government was expected to solve every problem, and suggested that the best that could be done was to give the impression of acting, notably through the provision of useless masks. Yet in reality, the action that Macmillan took amounted to far more than gesture politics. Masks may have been useless, but by appointing the Beaver Committee to conduct a thorough investigation, Macmillan initiated a process that was likely to lead to the recommendation of new, tighter regulations on air pollution. Macmillan disliked the supposed expectation that the state should solve every problem, but at the same time he could not escape the fact that such problem solving had become a part of political reality. In the face of a public health problem such as air pollution, the logic of post-war politics was towards greater state regulation, and even for a Conservative

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<sup>66</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Iain Macleod to R.A Butler, 6 November 1953; TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Iain Macleod to the Prime Minister, 10 November 1953

<sup>67</sup> TNA: MH 58/398, Letter from Iain Macleod to R.A Butler, 6 November 1953

government that had been elected in 1951 with a manifesto committed to loosening state controls, that logic was difficult to resist. In the era of the welfare state, the parameters of government had shifted. A national problem, highlighted by a very real disaster in December 1952, called for a national solution, and this combined with a perception among ministers that the public expected government to act. Furthermore, the structure of Whitehall ensured that civil servants, particularly the medical specialists within the MOH, set about investigating the problem almost as soon as it arose. Even if the Conservative government had wanted to ignore the problem, the political circumstances of the 1950s meant that it would have been incredibly difficult for it to do so.

The full report of the Beaver Committee would come in 1954, but in the meantime its interim report was published in December 1953, almost one year after London's great smog. The interim report began by stating that medical opinion left no doubt that smog posed a real threat to health, and stressed that there was no 'quick and easy' solution – 'full remedial measures will take time'.<sup>68</sup> The Committee's investigations were to continue, but in the meantime it made some recommendations for immediate action. The BBC was to issue fog warnings when necessary, and the government was to take measures to improve stocks of smokeless fuels. Steps should be taken to educate the public about the contribution to air pollution made by domestic smoke, and householders were urged to burn a mixture of coal and smokeless coke, and limit their fuel usage during fogs. Vulnerable people were urged to stay indoors as much as possible in the event of smog, and to cover their mouths and noses when venturing outdoors.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Committee on Air Pollution, *Interim Report* (1953, Cmd. 9011), pp. 6-7

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9

The government emphasised those short-term recommendations when it published the interim report, and stressed that it was giving the problem its ‘earnest attention’.<sup>70</sup> The hope was that the interim report would offset criticism of government inaction, but the press response was fairly hostile. In an editorial headlined ‘Sloth in the Smog’, the *Evening Standard* described the interim report as a ‘disappointing document’, and asked why it offered mere palliatives, rather than proposals for a ‘radical attack on smog’. ‘How much longer,’ the editorial asked, ‘must Londoners wait while committees and Government departments dawdle at their leisure?’<sup>71</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* was also critical, pointing out that, while the short-term measures the report proposed were ‘sensible enough’, they did not excuse the slow pace of more fundamental reform.<sup>72</sup> The *Daily Mirror*, too, was derisive, noting that ‘after four months of deliberation’ the best recommendation the Committee had come up with was for people to burn less coal when it was foggy.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, having faced significant criticism during 1953, it appeared unlikely that the government would be able to avoid the issue of air pollution in 1954. The publication of the interim Beaver Report gave the government the opportunity to propose some short-term remedies, but as the Committee continued with its investigation, it was clear that more detailed measures would need to be put forward in the near future.

### **The Committee on Air Pollution**

As has been noted, the decision to appoint a Committee on Air Pollution was taken by the government in the spring of 1953, and announced in Parliament on 8 May. In

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<sup>70</sup> TNA: PREM 11/952, Statement by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, 2 December 1953

<sup>71</sup> *Evening Standard*, 3 December 1953

<sup>72</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 December 1953

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 3 December 1953

June, Macmillan approached Sir Hugh Beaver to ask if he would chair the Committee.<sup>74</sup> Beaver agreed, and was joined on the Committee by 11 other members, who included local authority housing managers and medical officers, an economist, a professor of public health, a fuel technologist, a chemical engineer, a lawyer and a meteorologist. Additionally, a panel of assessors was appointed, comprising representatives of the relevant government departments. The Committee was given the following terms of reference:

To examine the nature, causes and effects of air pollution and the efficiency of present preventative measures; to consider what further preventative measures are practicable; and to make recommendations.<sup>75</sup>

As the Committee began its work in July 1953, the government made clear what it expected from it. In internal correspondence prior to its establishment, MHLG officials had expressed their hope that the Committee would be realistic, and that it would not make 'pious exclamations about energetic action and smokeless zones without thought for the wherewithal'.<sup>76</sup> Concern was expressed that representatives of the NSAS, among whom there were 'a good many fanatics', would unduly influence the Committee. Given that existing studies, particularly Thorsheim's, have credited smoke abatement activists with driving forward the case for clean air measures, it is important to note the hostility within government towards the NSAS.<sup>77</sup> The organisation was a small society that enjoyed some elite support among peers and Commons backbenchers, and while it certainly played a role in raising the profile of the smoke pollution problem (particularly by assisting the Conservative MP Gerald Nabarro with a private member's bill in 1954, which is discussed later in

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<sup>74</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Letter from Harold Macmillan to Sir Hugh Beaver, 19 June 1953

<sup>75</sup> Committee on Air Pollution, *Report* (1954, Cmd. 9322), p. 2

<sup>76</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Proposed Committee on Atmospheric Pollution, 21 April 1953

<sup>77</sup> Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution*, p. 181



this chapter), its importance should not be exaggerated. The voice of the NSAS was one of many urging action, and the archival evidence does not suggest that government gave particular priority to its views.

This message to be realistic was relayed to the Committee on Air Pollution by Geoffrey Lloyd, the Minister of Fuel and Power, when he spoke at its first meeting on 29 July:

I should like if I may to emphasise the word ‘practicable’ as it appears in your terms of reference. We all want to see air pollution abolished. We should like there to be not merely more smokeless zones but one smokeless zone covering the whole county. But we cannot suddenly bring industry to a standstill or stop people lighting fires in their houses. We have to recognise that there are practical limitations, so the problem before us is to decide in a realistic way what steps can best be taken to reach our objective.<sup>78</sup>

However, while the Committee was urged to be practical, this did not lead to it holding back in its investigation of the air pollution problem. Its intentions were laid out in its interim report, which stressed that ‘the means of averting at least the worst evils of air pollution by smoke and grit are within practicable reach’. The report stated that the Committee would be embarking on a detailed study and making detailed recommendations, and pointed out that such work would only be worthwhile if there was ‘general acceptance of the fact that the cure will require heavy expenditure and full cooperation of all persons and all interests’.<sup>79</sup> From the outset, it was made clear that action against air pollution could not be taken half-heartedly.

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<sup>78</sup> TNA: HLG 55/79, Address by the Minister of Fuel and Power, 29 July 1953

<sup>79</sup> Cmd. 9011, pp. 29-30

The Beaver Committee approached the problem from two main angles. On the one hand, it explored the effects of air pollution on public health, while on the other it investigated the financial implications. In relation to health, it left little doubt that pollution had a significant negative impact. While gathering evidence, the Committee spoke to a range of medical experts and organisations, each of which stressed the detrimental effects of smoke pollution. The Society of Medical Officers of Health noted that its members had ‘striven against great difficulties to bring about a cleaner atmosphere’, and argued that ‘smoke is a social nuisance [that] should be regarded, by the very fact of its existence, as a legal nuisance’.<sup>80</sup> The Socialist Medical Association told the Committee that ‘the air we breathe is as important as the water we drink’, and suggested that ‘the air over cities should be looked upon as a water main and not as an open sewer into which effluents, however harmful, are poured’.<sup>81</sup> The Medical Research Council referred to air pollution as the ‘last and greatest environmental evil as yet unconquered’, and called both for further scientific research and for drastic preventative action.<sup>82</sup>

In its final report, the Committee was unequivocal. While the scientific evidence was incomplete, the report noted that ‘enough is known to make it abundantly clear that [air pollution] is injurious to both physical and mental health. It fosters disease and can cause death.’ To underline the point, the Committee provided some shocking statistics. In England and Wales in 1951, death rates from bronchitis per 100,000 people were 107.9 for men and 62.7 for women. By contrast, in Denmark they were 2.2 for men and 1.9 for women, and in Sweden 5.0 for men and 4.0 for women. In

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<sup>80</sup> TNA: HLG 55/83, Committee on Air Pollution: Memoranda (1953-54), Memorandum 57: Memorandum by the Society of Medical Officers of Health, 15 June 1954

<sup>81</sup> TNA: HLG 55/82, Committee on Air Pollution: Memoranda (1953-54), Memorandum 34: Evidence Presented by the Socialist Medical Association, 29 March 1954

<sup>82</sup> TNA: HLG 55/82, Memorandum 41: Note by Dr J.L. Burn of the Medical Research Council, 2 June 1954

addition, disparities could be identified between urban areas and rural areas. In heavily urbanised and industrialised Clydeside in 1952, 11.7 per cent of all male deaths and 9 per cent of all female deaths were due to respiratory disease, compared with 7.5 per cent and 5.6 per cent in the rest of Scotland. Pollution was also seen to be harmful because of its obscuring of sunlight, which ‘reduces resistance to infection and retards recovery from illness’. It was also thought that ‘reduced light and sunshine’ had a detrimental effect on mental health. ‘There can be no doubt, the Committee concluded, ‘that the effect of air pollution on health is wholly bad.’<sup>83</sup>

On top of the health effects, the Committee carried out a detailed investigation into the financial cost of pollution. A sub-committee was established under the Cambridge economist S.R. Dennison, which took evidence from a range of local authorities, businesses and interest groups. The findings of the sub-committee were highly significant, as they undermined any economic arguments against stricter controls on air pollution. Not only was smoke shown to damage the health of the British people; it was also shown to damage the British economy, at a time when the country could ill afford unnecessary waste. Tighter pollution regulations would be expensive to implement, and would carry a financial cost for certain industries, but in the long term they would result in significant savings for the economy, and go hand-in-hand with the modernisation of industry and the raising of national living standards. The final report of the Beaver Committee estimated that the annual cost of air pollution was £250 million, a figure it divided into direct costs and costs resulting from ‘loss of efficiency’.<sup>84</sup> By direct costs it meant ‘items of expenditure needed to repair the damage caused by, or to offset the effects of, pollution’. That could include the costs of laundry, building repair, additional lighting and medical

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<sup>83</sup> Cmd. 9322, pp. 8-10

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 45

services. Loss of efficiency referred to issues such as working days lost to sickness, disruption to transport, or the impact of pollution on agriculture.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, the Committee estimated that between £25 million and £50 million was wasted annually through the inefficient combustion of fuel.<sup>86</sup>

In generating its estimate, the sub-committee covered a wide range of costs. It was told by the Ministry of Agriculture that pollution impaired the growth of crops and could cause fluorosis in livestock, and that it was thought that the problem was costing agriculture up to £10 million per year.<sup>87</sup> For the transport industry, the sub-committee heard that pollution led to a variety of costs, including those arising from the corrosion of rails and buildings, and the financial losses incurred due to disruption caused by smog.<sup>88</sup> Local authorities explained how pollution increased the cost of maintaining council housing and public buildings. Sheffield City Council noted that houses at a site on the edge of the city required external painting once every five years, compared with once every three years at a site in the city centre.<sup>89</sup> Detailed information was provided by the department store chain Marks and Spencer, which estimated that air pollution was costing it over £60,000 per year through its impact on buildings, stock and ventilation. It noted that stone shop fronts in non-industrial areas required cleaning every seven to ten years, whereas in industrial areas cleaning was required twice as often. During the London smog of December 1952, Marks and Spencer experienced a 'phenomenal rise in the amount

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<sup>85</sup> TNA: HLG 55/102 Committee on Air Pollution: Sub-Committee on Cost of Pollution (1953-54), Minutes of First Meeting of Sub-Committee on Cost of Pollution, 14 January 1954

<sup>86</sup> Cmd. 9322, p. 45

<sup>87</sup> TNA: HLG 55/110 Committee on Air Pollution: Evidence from Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (1953-54), Letter from A.B. Bartlett, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, to Committee on Air Pollution, 2 June 1954

<sup>88</sup> TNA: HLG 55/108 Committee on Air Pollution: Evidence from Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation (1953-54), Memorandum Prepared by the Railway Executive, undated

<sup>89</sup> TNA: HLG 55/102, Letter from John Heys, Town Clerk of Sheffield, to Committee on Air Pollution, 10 February 1954

of goods soiled by dirt', incurring losses of £30,000.<sup>90</sup> Laundry was integral to the estimate of the cost of air pollution, with the sub-committee placing a figure of £25 million per year on the money wasted by both homes and businesses.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, a figure was also placed on deaths caused by pollution, with the Deputy Government Actuary valuing the lives of the 4,000 Londoners that died as a result of the 1952 smog at £1,000 per person.<sup>92</sup>

Having considered the cost of air pollution to health and the economy, the Beaver Committee concluded that the time had come for stricter regulation:

Enough has been said to prove that air pollution as it occurs in this country today is a social and economic evil of the first magnitude. It not only does untold harm to human health and happiness, it is also a prodigal waste of material resources. Expenditure on curing it would be a fraction of the savings which would result from the cure. The case for preventive action is overwhelming.<sup>93</sup>

The question, then, was what specifically could be done. First, the Committee made it clear that existing regulations were inadequate. There were no provisions in existing legislation for local authorities to set up smokeless zones, except through a special act of Parliament, and while there were regulations against 'black' smoke from industrial facilities, this was ill defined and difficult to enforce. The burden lay with complainants to prove that smoke was a nuisance, and it was a defence for the person responsible to simply show that 'the best practicable means' had been taken to try and reduce the smoke. Worst of all, existing legislation contained no provision

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<sup>90</sup> TNA: HLG 55/102, Letter from D.G. Bradford, Building and Equipment Department, Marks and Spencer Limited, to Committee on Air Pollution, 18 May 1954

<sup>91</sup> TNA: HLG 55/102, Draft Interim Report of the Sub-Committee on the Cost of Pollution, 25 July 1954

<sup>92</sup> TNA: HLG 55/102, Letter from R. Lessing to S.R. Dennison, 7 July 1954

<sup>93</sup> Cmd. 9322, p. 11

for regulating smoke from domestic chimneys, which the Committee noted was responsible for half of all smoke pollution. It argued that ‘no cure can ... be found for the heavy smoke pollution of our cities and towns unless the domestic chimney is dealt with’, and pointed out that it would be unfair to clamp down on industry without acting against domestic fires.<sup>94</sup>

What was required, the Committee argued, was for clean air to be declared a national policy, and recognised as an essential part of the domestic fuel strategy. It recommended that new legislation should be introduced, addressing pollution from both industrial and domestic sources. The emission of dark smoke, clearly defined, was to be prohibited in industry, and financial penalties were to be substantially increased. Local authorities were to be given the power to declare smokeless zones and smoke control areas, and to be required to produce annual reports on their progress. Crucially, such smoke control measures would cover domestic chimneys, and householders would receive financial contributions from the state towards the conversion of their appliances for the burning of smokeless fuels. A 50 per cent grant was to be made by the Exchequer, with a further contribution by local government. It was recommended that a national Clean Air Council should be established to coordinate smoke abatement efforts.<sup>95</sup> The objective of the policy would be to reduce the emission of smoke in populated areas by 80 per cent within ten to 15 years. The Committee acknowledged that this was ambitious, but stressed that it was a necessity. The time had come to tackle air pollution ‘with the same conviction and energy as were applied one hundred years ago in securing pure water’, and while doing so would be challenging and costly, it would ‘secure happier and

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp. 21, 26

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pp. 25, 27-28, 31-33

more healthy living conditions for millions of people', and cost 'far less than the national loss in allowing the evil to continue'.<sup>96</sup>

### **Towards the Clean Air Act**

The final report of the Committee on Air Pollution was published on 25 November 1954. In the press, the response to the report was broadly positive. *The Times* called air pollution 'an unnecessary evil', and noted that prevention was 'a field in which initiative must be taken by the Government'. With the Beaver Report providing a practical programme for action, *The Times* argued that the government had 'no excuse for further delay'.<sup>97</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* praised the report for setting out a clear plan 'to eliminate the causes of ... the deadly pollution that persists day in and day out, year after year, sapping our vitality, squandering our resources, and depressing our spirits', and pointed out that 'the important thing is that the committee puts the onus where it belongs – on the polluters ... and on the policymakers in so far as what they do or fail to do helps or hampers, compels or prevents remedial action'.<sup>98</sup> *The Economist* also welcomed the report, although it struck a note of caution that would feature throughout the debate around clean air legislation. While the case for remedial action was 'overwhelming', the 'introduction of penal legislation both on industry and the householder ... would represent a substantial addition to the control of the individual by the authority'. The question for the public would be to decide 'how high on the list of desirable, but expensive, social improvements it really puts clean air', and 'how much trouble it is prepared to undergo to achieve an amenity of which it has had little experience yet'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 6

<sup>97</sup> *The Times*, 23 November 1954

<sup>98</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23 November 1954

<sup>99</sup> *The Economist*, 4 December 1954

For its part, the government was keenly aware of the positive reception that the Beaver Report received. In a memorandum to the Cabinet Home Affairs Committee, the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Duncan Sandys (who had replaced Macmillan in October 1954), and the Minister of Fuel and Power, Geoffrey Lloyd, noted that ‘the reactions of the Press to the Beaver Report have been universally favourable and there is no doubt that the public expects the Government to take action on the lines recommended’. The memorandum advised that the government should adopt a ‘Clean Air Policy’, and put forward legislation accordingly.<sup>100</sup> At Cabinet, Sandys argued that ‘the Government had no alternative but to accept’ the Beaver Committee’s recommendations, and suggested that the government should announce its acceptance of them in ‘broad terms’. In the discussion, it was noted that ‘it could not be assumed that there would be no opposition to some of the measures recommended by the Beaver Committee’, particularly restrictions on householders’ burning of coal, and therefore the government would ‘be well advised to be cautious in committing themselves’.<sup>101</sup> Sandys announced the government’s position in Parliament on 25 January 1955, telling the House that it had been ‘decided in principle to adopt the policy recommended by the Beaver Committee’.<sup>102</sup>

While the government had bought itself time, and left significant room for manoeuvre, it continued to come under pressure in Parliament, particularly from backbench MPs. Even before the publication of the Beaver Report, MPs had attempted to press the government to act. In March 1954, Herbert Williams, Conservative MP for Croydon East, used a debate on the City of London Bill to raise the issue of air pollution. In the debate, the government faced criticism for the

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<sup>100</sup> TNA: CAB 129/73 Cabinet Memoranda (1955), Memorandum by the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Minister of Fuel and Power, 22 January 1955

<sup>101</sup> TNA: CAB 128/28 Cabinet Conclusions (1955), Cabinet Conclusions, 24 January 1955

<sup>102</sup> HC Deb, 25 January 1955, vol. 536, col. 40



pace of action, with Barnett Stross, Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central, arguing that it had moved too slowly and had been ‘rather lukewarm about the problem’, and Ellis Smith, Labour MP for Stoke South, suggesting that attempts to address the issue had met with ‘complacency, inertia and frustration’.<sup>103</sup> Later in 1954 the Conservative MP for Kidderminster, Gerald Nabarro, a longstanding advocate of smoke abatement, won the ballot to present a private member’s bill to Parliament, and opted to put forward a Clean Air Bill. In preparing the bill, Nabarro received funding and assistance from the NSAS, and the eventual parliamentary debate revealed that there was significant cross-party support for the introduction of stricter clean air measures.<sup>104</sup>

Introducing his bill for the second reading on 4 February 1955, Nabarro outlined the historical background of the problem, and drew particular attention to the economic aspect of the Beaver Committee’s investigations. He suggested that the implementation of his bill, which he described as ‘nearly the whole of Beaver, practically nothing but Beaver’, would cost £50 million per year, a sound investment when set against the £250 million that was being lost annually because of air pollution. Added to this, Nabarro noted, was the wastage of coal, a vital issue at a time when ‘this nation’s coal position is critical’. With annual coal production falling, and the government resorting to the importation of foreign coal, a policy that would reduce the amount of coal wasted through incomplete combustion would not only benefit public health, but also make economic sense. Nabarro informed the House that he and the supporters of the bill were serious in their promotion of the legislation, but pointed out that the main purpose was to spur the government to action. If the government agreed that it would introduce a bill of its own ‘to give full

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<sup>103</sup> HC Deb, 10 March 1954, vol. 524, cols. 2320, 2327

<sup>104</sup> Parker, ‘Struggle for clean air’, pp. 385-86

effect to a policy of clean air on the general lines recommended by the Beaver Committee', he would be willing to withdraw the private member's bill at the end of the debate.<sup>105</sup>

In the lengthy debate that followed, numerous members spoke in support of Nabarro's bill. Labour's Alfred Robens, MP for Blyth, noted that 'we are within measurable reach of having clean air in this country', and pointed out that the policy enjoyed support on both sides of the House. Like Nabarro, he linked the issue to Britain's economic efficiency, arguing that 'this country can maintain its position in the world as a great industrial nation only so long as it has a plentiful supply of fuel and power'. Clean air was the correct policy 'from the human standpoint', but it was also clear that 'from the country's economic standpoint, we cannot afford not to have a Bill of this kind'.<sup>106</sup> Other contributors to the debate focused more closely on the health aspect of air pollution. Barnett Stross suggested that the 1952 smog could have killed as many as 8,000 people, while Ellis Smith noted that statistics showed Britain to be 'the most backward in the world' on air pollution. It was, he said, a 'national scandal' that action had not been taken long ago and, now that the Beaver Report had caused 'a quickening of public consciousness', the time had come to finally address the problem'.<sup>107</sup>

While the debate did reveal much cross-bench support, it was not entirely consensual. Angus Maude, Conservative MP for Ealing South, sought to defend the government from criticism, pointing out that the Beaver Committee was only able to produce its report because the government had set it up in the first place.<sup>108</sup> Michael Higgs, Conservative MP for Bromsgrove, took it upon himself to introduce a word

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<sup>105</sup> HC Deb, 4 February 1955, vol. 536, cols. 1426, 1430, 1435

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., cols. 1436-39

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., cols. 1440, 1447-48

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., col. 1453

of caution about the types of measures that Nabarro was proposing. Noting that there was ‘a grave danger that ... the House will find itself unanimous’, and that such unanimity ‘always makes speeches monotonous, however well conceived they may be’, Higgs said that he had ‘an instinctive reaction against a bill which invades people’s houses’. Did householders realise, he asked, that the bill would not only ‘condemn them eternally to the use of either gas or electric fires, or of smokeless fuels’, but also compel them to allow officials to ‘enter their houses and inspect what is going on there?’ The Beaver Report was a technical document, produced by technical experts, and ‘we know the intolerance which the expert feels towards the point of view of the common man’. Higgs concluded by acknowledging the ‘grave importance of the problem’, but cautioned against the introduction of ‘premature or panic legislation’.<sup>109</sup> A different kind of objection was made by R.E. Winterbottom, Labour MP for Sheffield Brightside, who argued that it was unfair to force residents and local authorities in so-called ‘dirty’ areas to bear the cost of cleaning up the air, when the rest of the country benefitted from the industrial production that caused much of the pollution in those areas.<sup>110</sup>

Such objections, however, were outweighed by contributions in favour of the bill. Nabarro received the support of Enoch Powell, at that point still a backbencher, who stated that the debate represented the first time that he had found himself in disagreement with Higgs. Powell suggested that Nabarro’s bill was ‘in the line and tradition of our most successful public health legislation and of those successive great measures which have dealt with the working and living conditions of our people over the last 100 or 120 years’. Powell argued that the great public health reforms of the nineteenth century had involved three key steps. First, a ‘definite evil’

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., cols. 1453, 1462-65, 1471

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., cols. 1473-74

was identified, 'to the continuance of which public opinion is strongly adverse'; second, it was determined that 'avoidance and prevention [had] become practicable'; and, finally, the evil was 'defined and a prohibition imposed upon it by legislation'. In Powell's view, air pollution fulfilled those criteria. It was a definite evil, both in terms of health and economics, and there was 'real public demand for it to be terminated'. It would involve far-reaching measures, but preventing it was practicable – as a long-term policy, it was both affordable and achievable to convert homes to the use of smokeless fuel. As a representative of a Black Country constituency, Wolverhampton South-West, Powell noted that he was all too familiar with smoke pollution, and argued that 'the time is ripe now for a drastic step'. By passing clean air legislation, Parliament could 'lay the foundations of the last stage in this process of social improvement'.<sup>111</sup>

The government had decided ahead of the debate that it would agree to introduce its own clean air legislation. Sandys told the House that the debate was one of the best he had attended in a long time, and acknowledged the extent of agreement, both in Parliament and beyond, 'about preventing, as far as possible, the pollution of our atmosphere'. He argued that the government had not been dragging its feet, and expressed its 'warm support' for the objectives of Nabarro's bill. While the government would not be advising that the House adopt the private bill, it would in due course be introducing a 'comprehensive measure' of its own, which would 'follow the general lines of the Beaver Committee'.<sup>112</sup> Speaking for the opposition, Philip Noel-Baker, MP for Derby South, agreed that Labour, if it won the next election, would not interrupt the passage of the bill, provided that it lived up to

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., cols. 1476-78

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., cols. 1484-84, 1487

Sandys' promise. The debate ended with Nabarro withdrawing his private member's bill.<sup>113</sup>

The government introduced its Clean Air Bill to Parliament in July 1955, and it had its second reading in the Commons on 3 November. While the government presented the bill as 'a big step forward in combating the scourge of air pollution', it received significant criticism for not going far enough.<sup>114</sup> Particularly contentious were a clause that gave industry seven years to comply with the prohibitions against dark smoke, compared with three years in Nabarro's bill, and a loophole that required industrialists to comply only 'so far as practicable'.<sup>115</sup> In the view of Edith Summerskill, Labour MP for Warrington, the government had been far 'too lenient with the industrialists', and if it was really 'passionately anxious to clean the air', it 'would not have produced this kind of Bill'.<sup>116</sup> Nabarro himself was highly critical, describing the bill as 'ill-drafted' and 'too leisurely', and suggesting that 'the hand of the Federation of British Industries is writ large between the lines'. If the bill was to be effective, Nabarro argued, it would need 'a very great number of teeth that it does not at present possess'.<sup>117</sup>

Nabarro was correct to suggest that the government had consulted with industry in drafting the Clean Air Bill. The Federation of British Industries lobbied the MHLG to secure exemptions for industries already covered by the Alkali Acts, and Sandys offered his support in opposing tighter restrictions put forward in amendments to the bill by Nabarro and his parliamentary allies. However, the government did not give in entirely to the demands of industry. Sandys worked to achieve a compromise with parliamentary advocates of clean air, and ultimately informed industrial lobbyists

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., cols. 1509-10

<sup>114</sup> HC Deb, 3 November 1955, vol. 545, col. 1221

<sup>115</sup> Parker, 'Struggle for clean air', p. 402

<sup>116</sup> HC Deb, 3 November 1955, vol. 545, col. 1243

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., cols. 1244, 1252

that he would only go so far in accommodating their reservations towards the bill. The ‘so far as practicable’ loophole was included in the legislation as an alternative to the outright exemptions requested by industry.<sup>118</sup> It should also be noted that the Federation of British Industries was just one organisation among many that were consulted during the drafting and passage of the bill. Much of the consultation was between government and local authorities, and medical organisations and anti-smoke activists were also given the chance to offer their views on the provisions of the proposed legislation.<sup>119</sup>

While the government may have diluted elements of the policy to satisfy industry, this was arguably necessary, as the support of both industry and local authorities would be essential in order for the legislation to succeed.<sup>120</sup> If the Clean Air Act did not go as far as Nabarro’s private member’s bill, it still significantly tightened the regulations against air pollution, and reflected the recommendations of the Beaver Committee in a number of important respects. It made it an offence for factories to emit dark smoke, and introduced a colour scale with which such smoke could be identified. It also required factories to replace equipment to allow the burning of smokeless fuels, although the seven-year grace period and the ‘as far as practicable’ get-out clause represented important concessions to industry. In relation to domestic smoke, the provisions of the act were unprecedented. Local authorities were given the power to declare all or parts of their district to be ‘smoke control areas’, within which the emission of smoke, monitored by inspectors, would be an offence.

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<sup>118</sup> TNA: HLG 29/417 Clean Air Bill 1956: Miscellaneous Representations (1955-56), Letter from Sir Norman Kipping, Federation of British Industries, to Duncan Sandys, 21 March 1956; TNA: HLG 29/417, Letter from Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, to Sir Norman Kipping, Federation of British Industries, 5 April 1956; TNA: HLG 29/417, Letter from Duncan Sandys to Sir Norman Kipping, Federation of British Industries, 23 April 1956

<sup>119</sup> TNA: HLG 29/417, Letter from Urban District Councils Association to Duncan Sandys, 26 July 1955; TNA: HLG 29/417, Letter from the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health to Duncan Sandys, 25 October 1955; TNA: HLG 29/417, Amendments submitted by the National Smoke Abatement Society, 2 February 1956

<sup>120</sup> Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson, *The Politics of Clean Air* (Oxford, 1981), p. 113

Financial provisions were made for the replacement of fire grates in smoke control areas, with the state paying 70 per cent of the cost. As the Beaver Report had recommended, a Clean Air Council was established, and charged with advising local authorities and reviewing their progress.<sup>121</sup>

Initially, progress towards fulfilling the Clean Air Act was slow. The MHLG took until 1959 to identify the 'black' local authorities that were to move forward with establishing smoke control areas, and even then local authorities responded by dragging their feet. Supplies of smokeless fuels hampered progress, and it took until the late 1960s for local authorities to introduce smoke control in significant numbers. Nevertheless, major progress was made in the twenty years after the passage of the Clean Air Act. By 1971, five million homes were covered by smoke control orders, and domestic smoke emissions had fallen to 0.55 million tonnes per year, down from 1.35 million in 1956.<sup>122</sup> In London, a quarter of homes were covered by smoke control orders by 1962, and in that year the city suffered its last major smog. Although vehicle emissions would present a new challenge in the decades that followed, the air over Britain's towns and cities was arguably much cleaner in the 1970s than it had been in the 1950s. While the 1956 Clean Air Act cannot be held solely responsible – the shift from coal to gas and electricity, and the decline of the steam train played their part, for example – it is likely that the legislation made a significant contribution to this improvement.<sup>123</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In January 1955, *The Economist* expressed concern that 'an alarming number of normally far-sighted people from both parties' supported the measures that had been

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<sup>121</sup> Parker, 'Struggle for clean air', pp. 402-3

<sup>122</sup> Ashby and Anderson, *Politics of Clean Air*, pp. 116-17, 119

<sup>123</sup> Parker, 'Struggle for clean air', p. 406

set out in the Beaver Report and replicated in Gerald Nabarro's private member's bill. In particular, it was sceptical about proposed new controls on domestic coal use, and it urged the Conservative government to think very carefully before supporting 'a measure that might introduce a Gestapo to our grates'.<sup>124</sup> While *The Economist's* invocation of the Gestapo was hyperbolic (it is worth noting that the eventual legislation did not give smoke inspectors the right to access people's homes), its choice of words does serve to underline the significance of the 1956 Clean Air Act. At a time when the question of government control and intervention had become a key line of cleavage in British political debate, the air pollution measures represented a major extension of the state's power to regulate the environment. The fuel that people burned, not only in industry but also in their own homes, and the smoke that was emitted into the atmosphere became the subject of legal controls in order to maintain the quality of the air in Britain's towns and cities. While the planning and National Parks legislation discussed in chapter two represented different forms of environmental regulation from the control of air pollution, there was nevertheless continuity in terms of the government's willingness to extend its powers to protect and preserve people's surroundings. In the 1940s, the state intervened to improve the rural environment in the name of preservation, heritage and leisure, and in the 1950s it intervened to improve the urban environment through the provision of clean air. As is discussed in the following chapters, the state would continue to expand its responsibilities for providing clean and amenable surroundings in both rural and urban areas, culminating in 1970 in the creation of the Department of the Environment, and the formalisation of the 'environment' as a defined field of government policy.

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<sup>124</sup> *The Economist*, 22 January 1955



It is important to ask why it was that the Clean Air Act was passed in the 1950s, rather than earlier, or indeed later. It is not sufficient to ascribe it to the fact that air pollution was a problem in the 1950s – it had probably been at its worst in the 1890s, but no significant action was taken at that time. Undoubtedly, one specific event, the London smog of December 1952, played a key role. It was a dramatic event in visual terms, and even more dramatic in terms of its impact on the health of Londoners. With an estimated 4,000 killed (and perhaps more, depending on the estimate), the smog forcefully underlined the risks posed by air pollution, and made the problem difficult to ignore. As Thorsheim points out, medical and scientific understanding had advanced since the nineteenth century, and such expert knowledge played an important role in ensuring that the smog was recognised as a disaster.<sup>125</sup>

In the aftermath of the smog, media pressure and the work of backbench MPs ensured that the government could not simply ignore the problem. The contribution of the latter is particularly worthy of note. On an issue that was tangential to the standard party political battles, backbenchers on both sides of the House of Commons drew attention to air pollution, and pressured the government to act. With the press also highlighting the issue, a perception arose within government that public opinion desired clean air measures. Opinion on the problem was not subject to measurement, but official documents reveal that there was sensitivity within the Churchill government to what the public *appeared* to desire, and this played a role in the formulation of policy. As later chapters demonstrate, sensitivity to perceived public opinion was crucial to shaping environmental politics, and by the late 1960s both the Conservative and Labour parties had come to view the protection of the environment, linked to the enhancement of ‘quality of life’, as having potential electoral saliency.

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<sup>125</sup> Thorsheim, ‘Interpreting the London fog disaster’, p. 161

However, the response to the 1952 smog should not simply be viewed as a case of a reluctant Conservative government being forced to act as a result of media, public and backbench pressure. The relevant departments actually reacted quickly to the London smog, at least once it became apparent that it had resulted in a significant rise in mortality and morbidity, and it is important to recognise the role of civil servants in advancing the case for clean air. In particular, the Ministry of Health, a department that had grown in both human and financial resources since the foundation of the National Health Service, took the lead in investigating what had happened, with officials bringing their medical and scientific expertise to bear upon the problem. There was a degree of hesitancy, particularly within the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, where officials initially hoped to attribute the deaths to cold rather than the smog, but on the whole the departmental documents show that there was a realisation within Whitehall that new, tighter regulations on air pollution would be required.

Elected politicians within government may have been slower to react than civil servants, but nevertheless it would be wrong to portray Conservative ministers as entirely reluctant. As is noted throughout this thesis, the development of environmental policy was to a great extent shaped by the work of elected governments and prominent actors within both main political parties. In explaining why the Clean Air Act was passed, it is important to acknowledge the political context of the 1950s. The Conservative government had been elected in 1951 on a manifesto that pledged an unravelling of state regulation, but, as is well established, it did not undo all of the work of its Labour predecessor. Its approach to air pollution was in keeping with its wider approach to the welfare state, and was exemplified by the remarks and actions of the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Harold

Macmillan. In referring to the perceived public desire for the regulation of air pollution as ‘a symptom of the Welfare State’, Macmillan displayed scepticism towards the value of government intervention, but he nevertheless took action to address the problem. The establishment of the Committee on Air Pollution could be viewed simply as a means for deflecting criticism, but the reality is that it was given the mandate and resources to conduct a thorough investigation into the problem of air pollution. If the government was reluctant, this did not prevent it from initiating a process that was always likely to lead to detailed recommendations for clean air legislation, and prompt further public and political pressure for action.

Crucially, the air pollution problem had two dimensions – public health and economics – that combined to create favourable conditions for governmental action. As noted, the 1952 smog deaths had shown that something needed to be done, and the shocking evidence of the Beaver Committee, particularly the comparisons between Britain and other European countries, further underlined the health risks. With its direct impact on life and death, air pollution was ripe for comparison with the public health reforms of the nineteenth century, particularly those relating to sewerage and clean water. As Enoch Powell skilfully noted during the debate on the Nabarro bill, there were plenty of precedents for such action, and if it was possible to solve the problem of air pollution then the state had a responsibility to do so. That tradition of public health reform would combine with the interventionist politics of the welfare state to create favourable conditions for clean air legislation. In such a political climate, counter arguments relating to *laissez-faire* economics and the personal freedom of householders only ever received a limited hearing. As chapter two also shows in terms of the perceived benefits of outdoor recreation, when public

health was considered to be at stake, the likelihood increased that government would display a willingness to enact environmental policies.

Furthermore, cleaning up the air was given an economic rationale. The investigation into the costs of air pollution was a key element of the Beaver Committee's work, as it made action highly attractive. In the context of the 1950s, when Britain was recovering economically and struggling to maintain its global status, a policy that had the potential to save £250 million per year in unnecessary waste made rational sense. It even offered a means for preserving coal resources at a moment when British coal production was falling. Clean air could be seen as another step in the country's modernisation – like the town and country planning discussed in the previous chapter, it could form a part of the 'rationalisation of development'.

Ultimately, the Clean Air Act was passed because, from the perspective of both public health and the economy, it dovetailed with the Conservative government's political priorities. Government did require encouragement, particularly from the press and Parliament, but it was willing to act because it was practical to do so – it urged the Beaver Committee to be realistic when it was appointed, and it was eventually handed a report that set out a programme of achievable reform. The Clean Air Act of 1956 demonstrated that when a problem captured sufficient attention, and its resolution did not conflict too far with the pursuit of economic growth, the British government was likely to take action and extend state regulation of the environment. Alongside the other cases explored in this thesis, air pollution is an example of how environmental policies took shape in Britain as solutions of governance enacted within a modern, technological nation. However, it is important to note the limits of environmental politics. As the following chapter shows with reference to the nuclear power programme of the 1950s and early 1960s, when the

case for the protection of the environment did not sit easily alongside dominant political priorities, the former was likely to face significant obstacles to success.

## Chapter Four

### Nuclear Power and the Preservation of the Countryside

In February 1955 the British government announced a plan for establishing the country as a world leader in the use of atomic energy for civil electricity generation. The scheme, detailed in the White Paper *A Programme for Nuclear Power*, was highly ambitious. The government proposed to construct ten nuclear power stations over the course of ten years, with the aim of meeting a quarter of the UK's electricity requirements by 1965.<sup>1</sup> (Ultimately, the plan was too ambitious – nuclear accounted for 10 per cent of UK electricity production by 1965, and the figure only reached 25 per cent in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>)

While the White Paper made the case for nuclear in raw economic terms, noting that 'the country's great and growing demand for energy ... is placing increasing strain on our supplies of coal and makes the search for supplementary sources of energy a matter of urgency', atomic energy was presented as more than simply an alternative to depleted coal resources. As the introduction to the White Paper made clear, the establishment of a civil nuclear power programme was seen as a vital step in humanity's scientific and technological advancement:

Nuclear energy is the energy of the future. Although we are still only at the edge of knowledge of its peaceful uses, we know enough to assess some of its possibilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Fuel and Power, *A Programme for Nuclear Power* (Cmd. 9389, 1955), pp. 6, 8

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons Library, 'Nuclear Energy Statistics', 9 September 2013, [www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn03631.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn03631.pdf) (accessed 27 April 2016)

Our future as an industrial country depends both on the ability of our scientists to discover the secrets of nature and on our speed in applying the new techniques that science places within our grasp.<sup>3</sup>

This futurist discourse, with its emphasis on the conquering of nature for the benefit of humanity, was prevalent throughout discussion of the potential of nuclear power during its early development in the 1950s. As Ian Welsh notes, it was in this period that ‘the discourses that “civilisation was based on power”; that nuclear energy provided a brave new future for Britain ... and that this was a bold new frontier became firmly established in the public realm’.<sup>4</sup> Such discourses point to the relevance of the nuclear power programme in the wider context of post-war British politics. At a time when reconstruction, full employment and rising affluence were key priorities for both Conservative and Labour governments, the nuclear power programme was proposed on the grounds that it would involve the application of a great technological discovery in order to drive British economic growth and expand access to the rising living standards of the period, either indirectly through the provision of electricity or directly through the provision of jobs at the new power stations.

Early official discussion of nuclear energy had characterised the technology as ‘the most important step taken by man in the mastery of nature since the discovery of fire’, and that view was reflected in the opening by the Queen of the world’s first large-scale civil nuclear power station at Calder Hall, Cumbria on 17 October 1956.<sup>5</sup>

Having performed the symbolic task of connecting the station to the electricity grid,

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<sup>3</sup> Cmd. 9389, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> Ian Welsh, *Mobilizing Modernity: The Nuclear Moment* (London, 2000), p. 66

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Office, *The Future Organisation of the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Project* (Cmd. 8986, 1953), p.

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the monarch gave a speech that placed the moment in the context of the remarkable scientific and technological developments of the preceding century:

In this turbulent century we have seen one technical revolution succeed another with astonishing speed. Within the span of a few generations our way of life has been transformed beyond anything our forefathers could have imagined. The age of steam was succeeded by an age of such startling achievement that we who are close to it can hardly realise that so short a period encompassed the invention of the motor car, the wireless, the aeroplane, and much else besides, which we now take for granted.

So quickly have we learned to accept the pace of modern development that we have been in danger of losing our sense of wonder. That sense has been dramatically restored by the advent of the atomic age.<sup>6</sup>

Such rhetoric demonstrates how nuclear technology became emblematic of post-war modernity. As Becky Conekin shows in her work on the 1951 Festival of Britain, the Attlee governments had emphasised the importance of progress and stressed the role that science and technology would play in building a better Britain, and that was a message that was retained under the Conservative governments of the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> In their push to establish Britain as the world's leader in civil nuclear power, the governments of Churchill, Eden and Macmillan were undoubtedly promoting the modern, as seen in their adoption of a discourse that emphasised the transformative potential of atomic energy. The technological enthusiasm for peaceful nuclear power was paralleled in defence, as Britain pushed to develop an independent hydrogen bomb (it would explode its first thermonuclear device in 1957). The British

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 18 October 1956

<sup>7</sup> Becky Conekin, *The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain* (Manchester, 2003), p. 46



government's desire to lead the world in civil nuclear technology reflected its emphasis on innovation in armaments, where the aim was to outpace US weapons development.<sup>8</sup>

The unique risks posed by the new technology of nuclear energy, and the need to exercise caution on account of relative inexperience among experts, placed the programme into direct conflict with the case for the conservation of the environment. Official policy required nuclear power stations to be constructed away from densely populated areas, and this safety requirement, together with the need for stations to be sited adjacent to large bodies of water for cooling purposes, meant that the installations were proposed for some of the country's most picturesque rural areas.<sup>9</sup> Under the 1947 and 1957 Electricity Acts, the Minister of Fuel and Power (Minister of Power from 1957) was required to consider objections lodged against proposed stations, and was given the power to hold public inquiries if deemed appropriate.<sup>10</sup> In keeping with post-war governmental attention to the protection of the countryside, the 1957 Act contained an 'amenity' clause that required the Minister to have 'regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty', and to 'take into account any effect which [power station] proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on ... flora, fauna, features, buildings or objects'.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1955 and 1963 the Central Electricity Authority (Central Electricity Generating Board after 1957) sought consent from the Minister of Power to build eight new nuclear power stations at the following locations in England and Wales: Berkeley, Gloucestershire; Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex; Hinkley Point, Gloucestershire; Trawsfynydd, Merionethshire; Dungeness, Kent; Sizewell, Suffolk; Oldbury,

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<sup>8</sup> David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 231-32

<sup>9</sup> Cmd. 9389, pp. 8-9

<sup>10</sup> *Electricity Act*, 1947, sec. 66; *Electricity Act*, 1957, sec. 34

<sup>11</sup> *Electricity Act*, 1957, sec. 37

Gloucestershire; and Wylfa, Anglesey. Of the eight, the Minister decided to hold public inquiries at Bradwell, Trawsfynydd, Dungeness, Oldbury and Wylfa. Additionally, a public inquiry was held in Scotland into the South of Scotland Electricity Board's proposal for a station at Hunterston, Ayrshire. There was also an inquiry at Winfrith Heath, Dorset, into the proposed construction of a nuclear research facility by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA).

At each of these locations the case for nuclear power was considered alongside arguments relating to landscape preservation and nature conservation, and the inquiries became arenas in which the advantages of technology were weighed against emerging environmental concerns. As remote locations, positioned, with the exception of Trawsfynydd, on stretches of coastline, the proposed sites were widely considered to be beauty spots, popular with local residents, holidaymakers and nature enthusiasts, and this inevitably raised the question of whether they were suitable for the construction of major industrial installations. It was asked whether British technological innovation, and the need for increased electricity generation, outweighed the aesthetic beauty and recreational utility of unspoiled sections of the countryside. The question loomed particularly large at Trawsfynydd, where the proposed power station would be situated in the Snowdonia National Park, placing the nuclear power programme into direct conflict with the government's own National Parks and nature preservation policy. The National Parks Commission appeared as an objector at the Trawsfynydd inquiry, while the Nature Conservancy objected at Dungeness, owing to the area's status as a nature reserve. The involvement of the two state conservation agencies underlines how the planning legislation of the post-war period had created the political conditions for environmental opposition to industrial and technological projects. Other objectors at

the siting inquiries included private individuals, some of whom lived locally and others whom travelled from further afield, and representatives of several of the leading conservationist and outdoor organisations of the period, including the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales, the Ramblers' Association and the Youth Hostels Association. The case in favour of the projects was advanced by the electricity board, with assistance from the UKAEA, but support did not only come from central government bodies. Private individuals spoke for as well as against the power stations, as did representatives of local authorities, trade unions and political parties.

The case of nuclear power underlines the complexity of environmental politics in post-war Britain. While on the surface the conflict over the siting of power stations might be characterised, in line with the work of Bill Luckin, as a clash between 'triumphalist' state-backed supporters of scientific advancement and 'traditionalist' preservationist campaigners, analysis of the inquiries reveals that both sides sought to reconcile technological and economic development with the preservation of the rural landscape.<sup>12</sup> As has already been shown in this thesis with reference to National Parks and clean air, and as will be demonstrated with reference to pollution and traffic in towns in later chapters, while post-war governments were committed to the growth of the economy and the development of Britain's technological capacity, both the Conservative and Labour parties simultaneously supported the extension of state powers to protect both urban and rural surroundings. The legislative measures of the 1940s and 1950s, discussed in chapters two and three, demonstrate that, amid significant post-war enthusiasm for technological progress, there were attempts by conventional political actors to control what Anthony Giddens characterises as the

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<sup>12</sup> Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in Inter-War Britain* (Manchester, 1990), pp. 1-3, 94

‘juggernaut’ of modernity.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, objectors to specific power station sites rarely expressed their views in terms of outright opposition to the nuclear power programme. As with earlier calls for the introduction of National Parks, the appeal for the protection of the rural landscape was presented as being compatible with the pursuit of development. Objectors were keen to express their enthusiasm for growth and progress, but at the same time they asked whether development had to necessitate the absolute triumph of the new at the expense of the old, and whether the preservation of the old – both in terms of the country’s natural environment and of its man-made heritage – could itself become a component of British modernity. Ultimately, however, it is important to note how the case of the nuclear power programme demonstrated the limits of environmental politics in the post-war period. While it is clear, as is shown throughout this thesis, that government was willing to enact environmental policies when they were considered to be compatible with dominant political priorities, nuclear power highlights what happened when such policies could not be squared with the imperative of development. While governments were attentive to environmental concerns in the post-war period, their key priority was the maintenance of Britain’s status as an economic power and a technological nation, and as such preservationist concerns were, in the end, easily overridden by the commitment to nuclear energy.

The proceedings of the nuclear power inquiries are traced here through the records of the Ministry of Power, the UKAEA, the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy, which are all held in the National Archives. Additionally, reference is made to the papers of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which are held in the Archives and Special Collections at the London School of Economics. The chapter also draws on national and local newspaper sources.

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 109-10, 139

### The official case

As we have seen, the 1955 White Paper established two core justifications for pursuing a large-scale nuclear power programme. On the one hand, nuclear power was portrayed as essential to Britain's economic wellbeing and continuing prosperity, while on the other it was presented as an exciting modernist leap into a bright technological future. In applying for permission to build the nuclear installations that would fulfil the ambitious programme, the electricity board employed both those narratives as justification.

At each inquiry that took place between 1955 and 1963, proceedings began with a presentation of the official case by the counsel representing the electricity board. At the first inquiry, at Bradwell in May 1956, Harold Willis QC opened the case for the Central Electricity Authority by emphasising the wondrous potential of nuclear energy:

For many years, scientists have dreamed of tapping the huge store of energy locked up in the atom, but it was not until 1939 that the secret of “nuclear fission” was discovered. It was immediately realised what great potentialities this new source of power provided for commerce and industry.<sup>14</sup>

The realisation of that potential was portrayed as vital to Britain's economic future. Speaking at the Trawsfynydd inquiry in February 1958, S.B.R. Cooke outlined the Central Electricity Generating Board (CEGB) case in numerical terms. In England and Wales, demand for electricity was doubling every ten to 12 years, and coal supplies were no longer sufficient for meeting that growing demand.<sup>15</sup> Called as a

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<sup>14</sup> The National Archives (TNA): AB 16/2227 Bradwell CEGB Power Station: Correspondence Regarding Public Inquiry (1956), Report on Proceedings of Bradwell Inquiry by Eric H. Underwood, of Public Relations Branch of UKAEA, 9 May 1956

<sup>15</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd: Public Inquiry Transcript, Day One (1958), pp. 4-5

witness at Dungeness in December 1958, Donald Clark, chief planning engineer for the CEBG, made the argument that the continuation of the economic growth enjoyed by Britain during the 1950s depended on the fulfilment of the nuclear power programme. 'It seems to us that it is vital to the future prosperity of the country,' Clark told the inquiry. 'If as a nation we are going to support fifty million people with a steadily rising standard of living, then the industrial output [of electricity] per head of the population must increase.'<sup>16</sup>

With such statements the electricity board representatives were echoing the arguments of those charged with leading Britain's drive to establish itself as a world leader in nuclear energy. Speaking in 1956, Sir John Cockcroft, head of the Research Group at the UKAEA, suggested that living standards would fall if the nuclear programme were unsuccessful:

Without the introduction of nuclear energy as a source of power there would not, twenty years from now, be enough of the ordinary present-day fuels to go round. The rise in our standard of living would come to a halt and in time even slip back. With atomic energy we can be fairly confident that our standard of living will go on improving.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the electricity board and the UKAEA, in line with the case presented by the government in its White Paper, made a compelling pitch for the construction of nuclear power stations. If they were to enjoy success, opponents of projects connected to the programme would require arguments capable of outweighing a case that portrayed atomic energy as integral to Britain's future as a prosperous economic power and a pioneer of technological modernity.

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<sup>16</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Proposed Nuclear Power Station at Dungeness, Kent: Public Inquiry (1958), Public Inquiry Transcript, Day One, p. 14

<sup>17</sup> TNA: AB 16/2227, Report by Eric H. Underwood, 9 May 1956

## **Risk and radiation**

Before analysing in detail the conflict that did arise over the proposed nuclear power stations, it is important to highlight what did *not* play a central role in the argument. From our present vantage point, it is tempting to assume that objections to nuclear power would centre on the potential dangers arising from the use of radioactive materials. Certainly, this applies to public opposition to the technology since the 1970s, with anti-nuclear campaigns in a range of countries focusing on the risk of accidents and the problems of radioactive waste disposal.<sup>18</sup> In his study of the reception of nuclear power in Britain, Ian Welsh draws on the published reports (but not the archival records) of two nuclear power inquiries from the 1950s – Bradwell and Hunterston – to argue that ‘unequivocal public acceptance of the nuclear moment has never been forthcoming’.<sup>19</sup> For Welsh, evidence of public ambivalence towards nuclear power in the 1950s can be found in expressions of concern around radiation in the early public inquiries. In his view, the inquiries show that ‘nuclear-specific issues were part of the public consciousness from the very earliest days of the nuclear enterprise’, and while the government and the electricity boards expected nuclear energy to be greeted with adulation at the inquiries, it was in fact met with ‘suspicion, distrust and open hostility’.<sup>20</sup>

Welsh is correct to note that concerns over radiation did play a role in the inquiries of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but focusing on this issue draws attention from conflicts that played a far greater role in proceedings. Certainly, some of those who appeared at the inquiries or lodged written objections were concerned about radiation. Ahead of the Dungeness inquiry, an individual objector named C. Vaughan

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<sup>18</sup> Dieter Rucht, ‘The impact of anti-nuclear power movements in international comparison’, in Martin Bauer (ed.), *Resistance to New Technology: Nuclear Power, Information Technology and Biotechnology* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 277

<sup>19</sup> Welsh, *Mobilizing Modernity*, p. 93

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 71

Saunders wrote to the Ministry of Power to express concern that birds roosting close to the station might become contaminated by radiation. ‘The prospect of so many winged messengers of death going inland from Dungeness,’ wrote Vaughan Saunders, ‘is not one to be relished.’<sup>21</sup> At Bradwell, there was discussion of the potential impact on oyster stocks of the cooling water that was to be discharged from the power station into the sea. The *News Chronicle* reported that fishermen along the Blackwater Estuary were ‘worried ... over the prospect of catching “atomic oysters”’, while the *Daily Sketch* wrote that ‘radioactive oysters may soon be dredged at Bradwell-on-Sea’.<sup>22</sup> At Trawsfynydd, the counsel representing the North Wales (Hydro-Electricity) Protection Committee noted that the discharge of water would raise the temperature of the lake beside which the power station was to be built, and asked whether ‘sufficient forethought’ had been given ‘to what result will be brought about by heating up the lake’. It might not be long, he suggested, ‘before some humourist slips a baby crocodile or two into the lake’, and locals found themselves ‘being snapped at by radioactive crocodiles’.<sup>23</sup>

Concerns over contamination were echoed, albeit in less sensational terms, by the National Farmers’ Union (NFU), which passed a resolution opposing Dungeness on account of ‘the possible risk to the health of the population and that of the large numbers of livestock kept here and also to crops and water supplies’ arising from radiation. Throughout the inquiries, it was the NFU that most consistently expressed the fears we have come to associate with opposition to nuclear power. In outlining its objections at the Oldbury inquiry in April 1960, the union pointed to ‘a natural lay

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<sup>21</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1126, Proposed Nuclear Power Station at Dungeness, Kent: Objections to Siting of Station (1958), Letter from C. Vaughan-Saunders to Lord Mills, Minister of Power, 11 July 1959

<sup>22</sup> *News Chronicle*, 28 April 1956; *Daily Sketch*, 28 April 1956

<sup>23</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, p. 66



concern at the ever rapid stepping up in the production of a potential Frankenstein monster, full control of which did not appear to be guaranteed'.<sup>24</sup>

However, while concerns relating to radiation did feature in the nuclear power inquiries of this period, what is striking in the documentary records is the extent to which such fears were *absent* from the discussions. It was even pointed out that nuclear power had the potential to be a far cleaner source of energy than coal. At the Trawsfynydd inquiry, Clark of the CEGB was asked by the counsel for his own side to 'deal with the impact that the construction and operation of [the station] would have on the environment'. While he acknowledged that it would be impossible to establish such an installation 'without having some impact on the environment', Clark pointed out that, unlike a coal-fired power station, a nuclear facility would produce little noise, and would not expel smoke or ash into the atmosphere.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, when Clark was asked to do the same thing at the Dungeness inquiry, he said that nuclear power had 'the advantage of being clean – there is no coal store, no need for an ash disposal mound, there are no chimneys, no smoke, no smell'.<sup>26</sup>

Even after the fire at the military reactor in Windscale, Cumbria in October 1957, which highlighted the potential risks of nuclear technology, the radiation issue did not play a dominant role in the proceedings of the nuclear power inquiries. At the Trawsfynydd inquiry, which took place just four months after the Windscale accident, the Farmers' Union of Wales asked for reassurance that a similar accident could not occur at a civil nuclear power plant, and when its counsel was assured that it could not, he stated that he was 'quite happy about that'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, when representatives of Kent County Council asked for such an assurance at Dungeness,

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<sup>24</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1250, Oldbury-on-Severn, Glos: Public Inquiry, Inspector's Report (1960), Inspector's Report, p. 58

<sup>25</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day One, pp. 23-24

<sup>26</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Dungeness Inquiry Transcript, Day One, p. 25

<sup>27</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Two, p. 40

the transcript of the inquiry indicates that they had no objection to the CEEGB's response.<sup>28</sup>

Further evidence for the limited effect of Windscale can be found in the records of the public relations department of the UKAEA. The fact that the Authority felt that it required a PR department demonstrates an awareness that public perceptions of nuclear energy required careful management, but the department's internal discussions suggest that this was carried out with significant success during this period. In a public relations policy document drafted in March 1961 (which discussed the public relations impact of the incident, rather than the technical question of any actual pollution released by the fire), the UKAEA praised itself for the way in which it had handled the incident in Cumbria:

Although the Windscale accident agitated the "apprehension pendulum" quite markedly in 1957, it did not (as it might have done) generate a national campaign for calling a halt to the further building of nuclear installations. There is no doubt that we emerged from this period with comparatively little damage because of the enlightened way in which the Authority accepted the responsibility of full and frank day-to-day exposition of what was happening.<sup>29</sup>

Safety concerns, then, did not pose a significant obstacle to the construction of nuclear power stations in the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, it was more common at the inquiries for objectors to call for the safety regulations governing the siting of stations to be relaxed. When given the opportunity to cross-examine the head of the UKAEA's Reactor Safety Division at the Dungeness inquiry, Max Nicholson, a

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<sup>28</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Dungeness Inquiry Transcript, Day Two, p. 26

<sup>29</sup> TNA: AB 6/2126, Publicity: General Policy (1958-61), Draft Public Relations Policy, 21 February 1961

leading conservationist and director of the Nature Conservancy, pursued a line of questioning that focused on determining how many years it would be before stations could be built closer to densely populated areas, and thus away from areas of natural beauty.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in objecting to Sizewell in 1959, the Ipswich and District Natural History Society argued that the station should be built in an area that had been ‘already spoilt’ by industrial development.<sup>31</sup> At Bradwell, this was a common argument. A list of objections taken to the Minister of Fuel and Power in February 1956 shows that safety was a low priority, appearing fifth out of six items on the list, and throughout the inquiry process calls were made for the construction of the station in a more populated area.<sup>32</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in January 1956, the former MP for Maldon, Tom Driberg, called for a relaxation of the siting rules, while an editorial column in the *Essex County Standard* in March of that year described the policy as a ‘foolish idea’ designed to ‘placate the quite unfounded fears of uninformed people’.<sup>33</sup> In an internal report on proceedings at Bradwell, the UKAEA’s director of public relations, Eric H. Underwood, expressed concern that the public were *too* confident about nuclear power. ‘The facts of the situation were received so calmly,’ wrote Underwood, ‘that there would appear to be a danger of public opinion underrating the risk and pressing for a siting policy less cautious than the one we have adopted.’<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, while there was discussion of the risks relating to radiation at the nuclear power inquiries, and such risks did play an important role in the arguments of some objectors, the issue should not be presented as integral to reservations around atomic

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<sup>30</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Dungeness Inquiry Transcript, Day Two, p. 28

<sup>31</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1127, Sizewell Nuclear Power Station: Objections to Siting of Station (1959), Letter from Ipswich and District Natural History Society to Ministry of Power, 16 March 1959

<sup>32</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Bradwell Nuclear Power Station: Objections to Proposed Power Station (1955-56), Record of a Deputation Received by Aubrey Jones, Minister of Fuel and Power, 26 February 1956

<sup>33</sup> *The Times*, 11 January 1956; *Essex County Standard*, 2 March 1956

<sup>34</sup> TNA: AB 16/2227, Report by Eric H. Underwood, 9 May 1956

energy in this period. In fact, the nature of the central conflict that arose at the inquiries can be discerned in the arguments of those who thought that the safety regulations governing the siting of nuclear power stations were *too* strict. As we shall see, what was contested at the inquiries was whether industry and economic development should be prioritised over the preservation of the countryside.

### **'Bread versus Beauty'**

The complaints that arose at the first inquiry at Bradwell set the tone for the objections at later inquiries. At Bradwell, 313 people filed formal objections, and their primary concern was put to Aubrey Jones, the Minister of Fuel and Power, by a deputation that visited him on 26 February 1956. Bradwell represented the 'last piece of unspoiled coastline within 50 miles of London', and as such ought to have been protected from such development. In the view of Joan Wolf, an objector from Wickford, Essex, 'the ancient peace of that whole area, hitherto untouched by the onrush of civilisation,' would be shattered and the area would 'doubtless be made hideous with new roads and buildings'.<sup>35</sup> For M.G. Carney, also of Wickford, the proposal at Bradwell was a symptom of a wider malaise:

Scarcely a month goes by but another part of this once beautiful country is irretrievably destroyed. There are many Englishmen who hold the country of their ancestors more dear than anything in life, and for these, as each fresh instance is reported, the sickness in their hearts grows heavier to bear. Most, from a conviction of helplessness, keep silent, as I have until this moment. But now this malignant growth which has already so much of the body in its

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<sup>35</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Record of deputation received by Minister of Fuel and Power, 26 February 1956; TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Joan F. Wolf to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 30 April 1956

grip is threatening the last untainted piece of healthy flesh in 50 miles from the country's heart.<sup>36</sup>

Such concern was echoed at subsequent inquiries. Speaking with reference to the building of the atomic research establishment at Winfrith Heath, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, the esteemed town planner and honorary secretary of the CPRE, argued that all areas of the countryside were threatened by such developments. 'Every county,' he said, 'which has an unspoilt area, has a danger of some use being found for it for these modern essential purposes.'<sup>37</sup> At Dungeness, the objectors' case rested on the area's status as a 'unique tongue of land and shingle, unmatched in character and at present unspoilt by modern development'. In a letter to the Minister of Power, N. Bower, an official at the Nature Conservancy, appealed to him to spare Dungeness and choose an alternative site that would 'avoid encroachment of conspicuous industrialism on one of the few undeveloped stretches of coast in south England'.<sup>38</sup> A similar argument was made in objection to Sizewell – it was 'one of the nearest stretches of unspoiled beautiful coastline to London', and as such was an unsuitable location for a nuclear plant.<sup>39</sup> At Oldbury, the CPRE argued that a station would represent 'an incongruous invasion of a peaceful, beautiful and unspoilt riverside landscape', and at Wylfa in 1961 a private objector, A.D. Kudwell, protested against 'the desecration of one of the few spots in the British Isles which have so far escaped the twentieth-century process of uglification'.<sup>40</sup>

However, while such objections played a prominent role in the debate over the construction of the stations, it is important to acknowledge that the nuclear power

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<sup>36</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from M.G. Carney to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 3 April 1956

<sup>37</sup> *Bournemouth Daily Echo*, 16 June 1956

<sup>38</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1126, Letter from Miss N. Bower to Lord Mills, Minister of Power, 31 July 1958

<sup>39</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1127, Letter from Anthony R. Wagner to Ministry of Power, 16 April 1959

<sup>40</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1250, Inspectors' Report, p. 59; TNA: POWE 14/1253 Proposed Nuclear Power Station at Wylfa, Ang: Objectors (1960-61), Letter from A.D. Kudwell to Richard Wood MP, 18 March 1961

programme was greeted with enthusiasm by a significant portion of those involved in the inquiries. The national discourse that surrounded nuclear power, which presented it as a symbol of modernity and progress, and as a potential driver of economic growth, had considerable purchase at the local level. In Bradwell, a vote taken at a parish meeting on the eve of the inquiry recorded 115 people in favour of the construction of the station, with 32 against.<sup>41</sup> At Trawsfynydd, a similar meeting apparently saw no objectors to the scheme at all, and Thomas William Jones, the Labour MP for Merionethshire, told the inquiry that he had ‘never known such unanimity in Wales’ as had been shown in favour of the nuclear power station. Jones’s point was supported by Thomas Evan Jenkins, chairman of Merionethshire County Council, who explained that the Council had passed a unanimous resolution in favour of the construction of a nuclear research facility or power station in the area, stating that they were ‘prepared to take all steps in their power’ to encourage such a project.<sup>42</sup> In the view of D.W. Jones-Williams, clerk to Merionethshire County Council, local enthusiasm could be attributed not only to the fact that a power station would bring new employment opportunities, but also to the fact that such a station was representative of progress:

[We] feel very strongly that this station is something of the future, and we have lived in this county for far too long looking to the past, without any hope for the future. I think that is why the coming of this nuclear power station signifies more to us than some similar industry which would employ

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<sup>41</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Bradwell Parish Council to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 20 March 1956

<sup>42</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day One, pp. 28-9; Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Two, p. 47

300 people. It is the fact that it is an atomic station; it is a smell of the future.

That is what we are looking forward to.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence of similar levels of local enthusiasm can be found elsewhere. Close to Dungeness, the majority of members at the annual general meeting of the New Romney and District Ratepayers' Association voted in favour of the project.<sup>44</sup> At Wylfa it was pointed out that there was overwhelming support from the people of Anglesey – the County Council highlighted that, from a total population of over 50,000 people, only 42 local residents had filed objections to the scheme.<sup>45</sup> In a report from Anglesey ahead of the inquiry, the *Guardian* noted that 'the active opposition is surprisingly small for a place which has remained comparatively untouched by industrial expansion'.<sup>46</sup>

The positive reception of nuclear power by many local people fitted with the assumptions of the UKAEA, whose public relations section had tried to predict how the public would react to projects involving nuclear technology. In a paper on public relations policy written in May 1955, Eric H. Underwood noted that while the British public had 'a deep antipathy to the new colossally destructive weapons' developed for military use, the power programme was well thought of on account of being a 'technical [advance] likely to bring economic benefits'. He added that facts about nuclear power 'are exciting in a Wellsian way and are favourably received'.<sup>47</sup> Such enthusiasm is well illustrated by the stance of anti-nuclear weapons campaigners at the time. While it has since come to combine opposition to military technology with opposition to civil atomic energy, in the late 1950s and early 1960s it was common

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<sup>43</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, p. 71

<sup>44</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Letter from A.J. Bess to Lord Mills, Minister of Power, 12 December 1958

<sup>45</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1252 Proposed Nuclear Power Station at Wylfa, Ang: Public Inquiry, Inspectors' Report (1961), p. 31

<sup>46</sup> *Guardian*, 15 February 1961

<sup>47</sup> TNA: AB 6/1415 Publicity: General Policy (1954-56), 'Paper on Public Relations Policy and Organisation', 13 May 1955

for the anti-nuclear weapons movement to advocate electricity generation as a positive alternative use for nuclear science. For example, a resolution passed in 1957 at the inaugural conference of the National Council for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons Testing, the precursor of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), called on the government to ‘pursue urgently the application of the new scientific knowledge of nuclear power to peaceful purposes’.<sup>48</sup> This commitment continued after the formation of the CND. A 1958 event entitled ‘Scientists on Trial’ featured a session on ‘Atoms for Peace’, while a vigil held in Whitehall in June 1958 appealed for Britain’s atomic power stations to be used only for the generation of power and not for the manufacture of weapons.<sup>49</sup> The Youth CND membership card featured a charter listing the arguments against nuclear weapons, and this included the assertion that ‘the waste of money, manpower and materials on nuclear arms is crippling Britain as an industrial atomic nation, which should be developing the peaceful uses for the benefit of mankind’.<sup>50</sup>

Often, even those that voiced objections to individual power station projects were keen to stress their broader backing for the nuclear power programme. Throughout the inquiry process, objectors prefaced their arguments with expressions of support, adopting the discourse of atomic energy as an emblem of modernity and technological progress. One objector to Bradwell, Louise Dawson of Chelsea, noted that ‘we must, of course, have atomic power stations’, before objecting on grounds of location, while another, Geoffrey Barber of Didcot, began his letter by stressing

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<sup>48</sup> London School of Economics Archives and Special Collections (LSE), Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), CND/2008/1/4 Gertrude Fishwick Papers (1955-57), Resolution of Conference on Nuclear Weapons Tests, 29 November 1956

<sup>49</sup> LSE: CND/2008/7/2/4 Leaflets, Pamphlets and Flyers (1958-80), Scientists on Trial Agenda, 22 September 1958; LSE: CND/2008/2/3 Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War Publicity Material (1957-61), Flyer, ‘Atom Plants for Peace – Not War, Whitehall Vigil, Saturday 28 June to Sunday 29 June 1958’

<sup>50</sup> LSE: CND/9/19/37 Youth Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (YCND) Leaflets and Handouts (1961-70), YCND Membership Card, 1960



that ‘my relations and I are *not* against progress, and newer devices’. Quinton Winch of Colchester acknowledged that nuclear power had put Britain on ‘the doorstep to a new age and new hope’, but asked whether the power station could be built elsewhere. For R.N. Gilbey of Bishops Stortford, the point was that ‘this part of Essex is surely too good to sacrifice – even upon such an important altar as that of nuclear power’.<sup>51</sup> This was echoed by Driberg, who wrote: ‘it is in the national interest that there should be an improved supply of electricity, but it is surely not less in the national interest that some stretches of coast and country should be left unspoiled’.<sup>52</sup>

Such arguments were repeated with reference to other locations. At Trawsfynydd, the North Wales (Hydro-Electric) Protection Committee emphasised that none of the objectors were arguing about ‘whether or not there should be a nuclear power station in North Wales. Of course there should be. What they are arguing about is whether this is the right place to put it.’ This was a view shared by the National Parks Commission, whose counsel, Roderic Brown QC, used his closing speech at the inquiry to point out that ‘the Commission is certainly not expressing any opposition to the development of nuclear power stations. In Britain as a whole there is no argument as to the national need for them.’<sup>53</sup> Likewise, in a letter to the Minister of Power regarding Dungeness, Lord Hurcomb, President of the Council for Nature, noted that ‘the Council of course recognises that developments in the form of new nuclear stations are required in the economic and scientific interest of the country’,

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<sup>51</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from L. Dawson to MFP, 24 July 1956; TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Geoffrey Barber to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 18 July 1956; TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Quinton Winch to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 26 February 1956; TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from R.N. Gilbey to Ministry of Fuel and Power, undated

<sup>52</sup> *The Times*, 11 January 1956

<sup>53</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day One, pp. 33-4; TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, p. 64

before outlining his objections to the chosen site.<sup>54</sup> In their letter objecting to Sizewell, the Ipswich and District Natural History Society wrote that they ‘realise that nuclear power stations have now become a necessary part of a programme for increasing electricity supplies’, but added that they ‘very strongly disagree with them being sited in attractive and undeveloped areas’.<sup>55</sup>

While we must allow for the possibility that the expression of support for the nuclear power programme stemmed from the tactical considerations of objectors (i.e. the government was more likely to listen to site-specific concerns than it was to objections that rejected the entire programme), the frequency with which those appearing at the inquiries acknowledged the national need for atomic energy suggests that the refusal to accept power stations in particular locations did not form part of a broader rejection of technological modernity. The official narrative of nuclear power – that it was one of humanity’s crowning technological achievements and that it pointed the way to a bright and prosperous future – was accepted by the objectors to individual power stations just as it was by supporters. As with the arguments for National Parks and town and country planning discussed in chapter two of this thesis, any Romantic inclinations tended to be tempered by an acceptance of the desirability of economic development.

Objectors were content to admit that there was much to gain from technological progress, but they also asked how much needed to be lost. It was a concern succinctly outlined by M. Corley, who represented the Cruising Association at the Bradwell inquiry. In Corley’s view, Bradwell constituted a test case. ‘To what extent in the new Industrial Revolution,’ he asked, ‘is the impersonal scientific judgement of

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<sup>54</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1126, Letter from Lord Hurcomb, President of Council for Nature, to Lord Mills, Minister of Power, 11 December 1958

<sup>55</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1127, Letter from Ipswich and District Natural History Society to Ministry of Power, 16 March 1959

the technologist to override the preservation of values of a more intangible and essential character?<sup>56</sup> Anthony Wagner, who wrote on behalf of the National Trust to object to the power station at Sizewell, stated that economic growth made it imperative that unspoiled countryside was preserved. ‘The point has to be made,’ he argued, ‘that industrial development and the growth of the population have put a previously un-thought of value on places where loneliness can be found in combination with nature and natural beauty.’<sup>57</sup> At Wylfa, the North Wales (Hydro-Electric) Protection Committee argued that ‘industry, while providing the means of enjoying the fruits and beauty of the world, is fast destroying that which it is intended to make available’. The process had the potential to devastate the landscape, but ‘by careful planning and by restraint, industry could serve to open the world for our fulfilment without destroying it’.<sup>58</sup>

In the opinion of Max Nicholson, representing the Nature Conservancy at Dungeness, many in Britain possessed a ‘split personality’:

[We] are all consumers of electricity; we all have an interest in the success of the very fine work which is being done by the [electricity] board. We also wish to leave something of what we have enjoyed to our children, and we wish to have access to wild places and so on. [...]

What we are discussing here is the collision between the two sides of that personality, the one which wants economic development and a higher

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<sup>56</sup> TNA: AB 16/2227, Report by Eric H. Underwood, 9 May 1956

<sup>57</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1127, Letter from Anthony R. Wagner to Ministry of Power, 16 April 1959

<sup>58</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1253, Pamphlet Produced by the North Wales (Hydro-Electricity) Protection Committee, 15 May 1961

standard of living, the other which wants science to advance, which wants the intangible values of our civilisation to be upheld and preserved.<sup>59</sup>

That collision of personalities – the conflict between progress and preservation – was thrown into sharp relief at Trawsfynydd, where the site of the proposed power station lay within the boundaries of the Snowdonia National Park. On account of the special status of the area, the National Parks Commission appeared as an objector at the Trawsfynydd inquiry. Under the terms of the National Parks Act, it was the responsibility of the Commission to make recommendations to the government ‘as to any proposals for the development of land in a National Park’ that appeared to be ‘inconsistent with the maintenance of the area as a Park’.<sup>60</sup> In the opinion of Lord Strang, Chairman of the Commission, there was no doubt that a nuclear power station was inconsistent with Snowdonia’s status as a National Park. ‘The Commission think that an installation of this scale and magnitude would be out of place in a National Park,’ Strang told the Trawsfynydd inquiry. ‘No one reading the National Parks Act would expect to find an atomic generating station within its boundaries.’ He added that ‘there must be the strongest presumption against the erection of a large-scale industrial installation in a National Park’.<sup>61</sup> Strang pointed out that this had been the position of the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan during his time as Minister of Housing and Local Government in Winston Churchill’s administration. Speaking in the House of Commons in July 1952, Macmillan discussed the difficulties ‘in deciding between economic and industrial development on the one hand, without which the country would fade away altogether, and the claims of amenity upon the other’. With reference to the planning responsibilities of local authorities in National Parks, he stated that ‘in those areas which are designated

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<sup>59</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Dungeness Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, pp. 1-2

<sup>60</sup> *National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act*, 1949, sec. 6

<sup>61</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, p. 15

as National Parks, amenity and access are to be given an overriding position'. It was that consideration, Macmillan concluded, that distinguished National Parks from other areas of the country.<sup>62</sup>

Those arguing in favour of the scheme at Trawsfynydd vehemently rejected the argument that National Parks should be free from industrial development. Thomas William Jones MP told the inquiry that, while those present had 'heard a great deal about the preservation of natural beauty in North Wales', he, along with his fellow Welsh Labour MPs, was 'concerned about the preservation of something of far greater importance, that is, the preservation of the Welsh way of life'. For Jones and others pushing for the construction of the station, the key concern was the high rate of unemployment in the area, and associated depopulation as people left to seek employment elsewhere. A nuclear power station at Trawsfynydd was seen as offering employment opportunities during the construction period, and 300 permanent positions upon completion. The 26 Labour MPs representing Welsh constituencies were so enthusiastic about the potential of nuclear power that they sent a deputation to the electricity board and, in the words of Jones, 'pleaded that Wales should be represented in this advanced scientific project'.<sup>63</sup>

The enthusiasm of the MPs was shared by Tom Jones of the Transport and General Workers Union, who argued that the station would contribute to the alleviation of Merionethshire's severe unemployment problem, and help to preserve the cultural identity of one of the heartlands of the Welsh language. As to the area's status as a National Park, Jones suggested that the local economy had to take priority. 'I think it is morally wrong,' Jones told the inquiry, 'that this cultured Welsh community should be sacrificed to the gods of scenic beauty, and that they should rot in unemployment

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<sup>62</sup> HC Deb, 14 July 1952, vol. 503, col. 1931

<sup>63</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day One, p. 28

or be forced to leave the land of their fathers in order to find employment.’ Inverting the Book of Genesis and the idea that man was given dominion over the earth, Jones concluded that the ‘vital factor in this situation’ was ‘that we do not allow the earth and its beauty to have dominion over man’.<sup>64</sup>

At the centre of the arguments made by local politicians was deep suspicion of National Parks, and their effect on local life. Appearing on behalf of Merionethshire County Council, D.W. Jones-Williams called as a witness the town planner J.S. Allen, who was asked for his view on whether industrial development should be permitted in National Parks. He argued that without schemes such as that proposed for Trawsfynydd, regions designated as Parks ran the risk of economic stagnation. ‘Life within National Parks must go on and be subject to change,’ he said, ‘for without the willingness to change to meet contemporary needs they would die and become museum pieces.’ Jones-Williams underlined this point, suggesting that if developments such as the Trawsfynydd station were opposed, ‘the people here will leave, and the place will become derelict. I think there can be no greater disfigurement to the countryside than derelict villages and desolate towns.’<sup>65</sup>

The nature of the conflict at the Trawsfynydd inquiry was neatly summarised by Mervyn Haigh of the Council for the Preservation of Rural Wales. It was, he told the inquiry, a dispute that is ‘popularly expressed by “Bread versus Beauty”’, a conflict ‘between two kinds of human claim, two kinds of civil rights, two kinds of national interest’. While the local politicians and trade unionists that appeared at the inquiry clearly believed in prioritising the economic wellbeing of the local population, for those opposing the station the preservation of natural beauty was considered to be of equal importance, as integral to the experience of modernity as the continuation of

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<sup>64</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day One, p. 36

<sup>65</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Two, pp. 46, 63

technological development. In the view of Percivale John Clarke, President of the Youth Hostels Association, protection of the landscape was so vital that it ought to be considered alongside economic development when judging national progress and prosperity:

National Parks are themselves symbols of a high standard of living, and, more important, of civilised restraint. They can exist only where a society is so far in command of its natural urges as to deny itself certain obvious satisfactions in order to preserve or make possible the enjoyment of some thing which is felt to be good and precious. They imply an attitude of respect for an admired landscape and for the complex association and traditions which have gathered around it; they imply a will to pass it on unscarred to succeeding generations, and a realisation that only by deliberate acts of will, constantly renewed to meet new temptations, can anything worthwhile survive the passage of time.<sup>66</sup>

In discussing Trawsfynydd, it is important to recognise local context. Clearly, Welsh nationalism played a part in the inquiry, and this does not apply to the other locations, with the exception of Wylfa. While this nationalism was implicit in local politicians' appeals for the preservation of 'the Welsh way of life', at times it rose to the surface. For instance, when Pauline Dower, the Deputy Chair of the National Parks Commission, was cross-examined by Philip Davis of the Farmers' Union of Wales, Davis had to be interrupted by the inspector chairing the inquiry when he began attacking her for being English, saying 'I want to say that, as a patriotic Welshman, I resent the coming of this good lady into Wales...'<sup>67</sup> At Wylfa, Eirwyn Gwynn, appearing for Plaid Cymru, stated that she was 'most strongly objecting to

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<sup>66</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, p. 51

<sup>67</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1244, Trawsfynydd Inquiry Transcript, Day Three, pp. 30-1

the presence of English organisations of people, who presume to tell us in Anglesey what to do'.<sup>68</sup> Alderman Robert Roberts, chair of the County Employment Committee, took a similar view. 'I don't want to be rude,' he told the inquiry, 'but I must say that we do not want cranks and busybodies from other parts of the country who have never been subjected to the hardships and the poverty we have experienced here between the two wars.'<sup>69</sup> In his evidence to the inquiry Cledwyn Hughes, MP for Anglesey, stated that he wanted 'to emphasise that Anglesey exists primarily for the people of Anglesey'. Outsiders were welcome to visit, but 'there are times when some people show more concern for scenery than they do for the wellbeing of the people'.<sup>70</sup>

While Welsh nationalism played a role in proceedings at Trawsfynydd and Wylfa, it formed part of a broader conflict over who stood to gain from the construction of nuclear power stations. As we have seen, there was much discussion at Trawsfynydd around the potential of the nuclear station to alleviate the local unemployment problem, and such arguments were replicated at Wylfa. The County Planning Officer told the inquiry that the local council had passed a resolution urging the electricity board to build a station in Anglesey, as such a project 'would constitute a major step towards the relief of unemployment in the county'. This was echoed by Alderman Robert Roberts, who said that he hoped the station would be 'the solution to the unemployment problem', and who noted that the scheme was 'wholeheartedly welcomed by trade unionists and all members of the working class'.<sup>71</sup> While employment did not play as great a role in the inquiries in England, perhaps owing to the more severe levels of unemployment in North Wales at the time, it was still used

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<sup>68</sup> *Western Mail*, 1 June 1961

<sup>69</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 2 June 1961

<sup>70</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1252, Wylfa Inquiry Inspectors' Report, p. 39

<sup>71</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1252, Wylfa Inquiry Inspectors' Report, p. 35



as an argument by supporters of the projects. Because of its potential for providing jobs, the proposal for a nuclear research establishment at Winfrith Heath received the backing of trade unions, the local council and local branches of the Labour Party.<sup>72</sup> With reference to Bradwell, a letter from Brian Harrison MP to Duncan Sandys, the Minister of Housing and Local Government, captured the nature of local divisions over the project:

A number of people like Tom Driberg and John Betjeman would like to see this village preserved as a show piece. These people represent entirely the weekenders and a limited number of retired persons. Tom Driberg's gardener put the village people's view very well when he said to Driberg: "It is all very well for you but this will probably mean a better school for my children."<sup>73</sup>

At times the arguments of the objectors betrayed an air of elitism, or at least a belief that there was a cultural distinction between those who appreciated rural beauty, and those who did not. Writing to object to Bradwell, Louise Dawson expressed her hope that 'no more places that are loved by so many discriminating people will be used for the purpose' of nuclear power. For Joan Wolf, the real shock of the Bradwell proposal was that it was being developed under a Conservative government: 'One might expect this sort of thing under a Socialist government, but that it should be mooted by a Conservative administration is utterly disheartening.' It was common for such objectors to ask why the stations could not be built in urban areas, or at least away from cherished sections of the English countryside. 'Surely it is better to use some war-scarred or slum clearance site,' wrote Louise Dawson.<sup>74</sup> It was

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<sup>72</sup> TNA: AB 6/1827 Winfrith Heath Public Inquiry (1957), Report on the Public Enquiry into the Proposal to Erect an Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Winfrith Heath, p. 1

<sup>73</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Brian Harrison MP to Duncan Sandys, Minister of Housing and Local Government, 5 January 1956

<sup>74</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Louise Dawson to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 24 July 1956; TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Joan F. Wolf to Ministry of Fuel and Power, 30 April 1956

a view shared by Lady Joan Davidson of Berkhamsted, who suggested that the station 'should be built among the chimney pots which already exist in the urban areas of Essex'.<sup>75</sup> For the Chairman of the Essex Wildfowlers' Association, the question of an alternative location to Bradwell was a simple one: 'Why not Wales?'<sup>76</sup>

The clash between those that emphasised development and employment, and those that emphasised conservation and the appreciation of natural beauty, points to the place of the conflict over nuclear power in the broader context of British politics in the 1950s and early 1960s. Successive governments promoted economic modernisation and sought credit for the newfound levels of affluence made possible by the innovations of the time. For those that supported nuclear power in locations like Trawsfynydd or Wylfa, the official justifications for the programme had a clear appeal – in welcoming atomic energy into their area they were welcoming a symbolic technology that bore all the hallmarks of modernity and future progress, as well as a new source of employment that had the potential to provide local people with access to the rising living standards promised by the governments of the day.

Yet, amid great enthusiasm for technological development, the post-war years were also the period in which the conservation of nature entered the structure of British politics. As chapter two of this thesis shows, the Labour and Conservative parties had supported the introduction of National Parks in the 1940s with the aim both of protecting areas of the countryside from the ongoing processes of urbanisation and industrialisation, and of providing greater recreational opportunities for the British people. A hard-working population was seen as deserving leisure and the opportunity

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<sup>75</sup> TNA: POWE 14/871, Letter from Lady Joan Davidson, Berkhamsted, to Aubrey Jones, Minister of Fuel and Power, 16 March 1956

<sup>76</sup> TNA: HLG 51/1151 Berkeley, Glos; Bradwell, Essex: Siting of Nuclear Power Stations; Objections from the Public (1955-56), Briefing Document, 27 February 1956

to escape from busy urban life, and in order to make this possible the government moved to protect the more beautiful parts of the countryside.

National Parks were made necessary by the pace of industrial and urban development, but they were not an attack on modernity. Rather they were a measure designed to improve the British people's experience of modernity. This rationale was captured in the judgement of C.D Buchanan, the inspector representing the Ministry of Housing and Local Government at the Trawsfynydd inquiry, who opted to abstain from recommending that his Minister should support the project (he stopped short of advising the Minister to oppose it). In the inquiry report, Buchanan argued that National Parks were becoming increasingly valuable 'as more and more people get holidays-with-pay, as more people acquire motor-cars, and as open-air pursuits attract a wider following'. Their value, he added,

must increase as open-air amenities in other parts of the country are affected by industrial and urban developments (many perhaps quite unseen at the moment) which are demanded by advancing technologies and are needed to survive as a great industrial nation. I have heard it suggested that our efforts to survive in this way could produce a country not worth surviving in. That is doubtless a very gloomy view, but to some people there is at least a discernable tendency in that direction. I would have thought the National Parks ought to stand as indestructible bulwarks against such a danger however remote it may seem at present.<sup>77</sup>

National Parks, then, were a product of economic development, intended as a counterbalance to its perceived excesses. As modernisation continued apace in post-

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<sup>77</sup> HMSO, *Report of the Public Inquiry Concerning Proposals by the Central Electricity Generating Board to Construct a Nuclear Power Station at Trawsfynydd Together With Certain Overhead Transmission Lines* (London, 1958), p. 32

war Britain, conservation entered formal politics, not as an attack on modernity, but as part of its negotiation by those living through it. The increasing political visibility of environmental concerns was apparent during the nuclear power inquiries, not least at Trawsfynydd and Dungeness, where two recently-formed government agencies, the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy, went head-to-head with another, the Central Electricity Generating Board, in opposing a major infrastructure project. The imperative of technological progress was accepted at the nuclear power inquiries, but there remained questions over exactly what the future would entail. In the words of one private objector at the Wylfa inquiry, ‘just how far are we, as a nation, willing to go in our chase after higher standards of living?’<sup>78</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It must be noted that all of the nuclear power stations proposed during the late 1950s and early 1960s were built – none of the objectors at the inquiries were successful in preventing the construction of a station. However, despite this apparent failure, the debates around the nuclear power programme provide evidence of a significant development in post-war British politics, central to the argument of this thesis. With the town and country planning and National Parks legislation discussed in chapter two, the Attlee government made the preservation of the countryside a matter of state policy. ‘Amenity’ had become a necessary consideration in planning decisions, and the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act had set up two government bodies, the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy, that were intended to promote the cause of conservation. Once conservation was established as part of the administrative framework of planning, local and central government did not have the option of simply ignoring it. When the siting of nuclear

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<sup>78</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1252, Wylfa Inspectors’ Report, p. 59

power stations came up for discussion in the 1950s, the Conservative government's own electricity legislation required it to take account of amenity, and the protection of the rural landscape necessarily became a central point of debate during the public inquiry process. Representatives of the National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy took their responsibilities seriously, showing a willingness to mount opposition to projects that were advanced by the British state, despite their own status as statutory bodies. Although government policy was dominated by the priority of maintaining Britain's status as a leading economic and technological nation, the cases examined throughout this thesis, from countryside preservation to pollution and traffic in towns, demonstrate that the protection of the environment was not entirely neglected. The environment was taking shape as a field of policy during the post-war period, and becoming a factor in the decisions taken within Whitehall.

While they cannot provide us with a true measure of national opinion, the nuclear power inquiries offer a snapshot of the range of public views around technological development and the preservation of the countryside. On the one hand, as was seen in particular in North Wales, the desire of many people for economic security outweighed any interest in conservation, and measures such as National Parks were seen as frivolous when set against the prospect of jobs and growth. On the other side of the argument, large numbers of objectors emphasised the vital need to protect rural beauty, and asked whether the destruction of the countryside was a price worth paying for economic development. It appears that there was a class dimension to this difference of opinion, with trade unions and Labour MPs speaking up for jobs, while predominantly middle-class conservationist organisations played a prominent role in opposing the power stations. This is a split that invites reference to Ronald

Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism – it was only once economic security had been achieved that individuals could turn their attentions to the luxury of protecting the rural landscape.

The division, however, was not a binary one. As Nicholson suggested at the Dungeness inquiry with his reference to a 'split personality', it is possible that many people in Britain were pulled in both directions, desiring the fruits of affluence and the trappings of modern life, as represented by nuclear-generated electricity, while also wishing to preserve the countryside for future generations. Frequently during the inquiries process, it was argued that progress and preservation could occur side-by-side, with National Parks representing the conscious effort of an affluent society to control its own excesses. The position of the majority may have been best summed up in the *Liverpool Daily Post* in reference to Wylfa, when the newspaper criticised both the 'lunatic fringes' of the objectors, 'who wish Anglesey to remain forever an island full of simple rustics tilling the soil or drawing the dole', and the more fervent advocates of nuclear power, 'the industry-at-any-price section', who would sacrifice too much 'for rateable value and jobs'.<sup>79</sup> This underlines a theme that is present throughout this thesis. While calls for the protection of the environment, both urban and rural, increased during the inter-war and post-war periods, they were often expressed alongside enthusiasm for economic and technological development, and did not represent an expression of an 'anti-industrial' spirit or a radical backlash against growth.

Ultimately, however, the nuclear power programme demonstrated the limits of environmental politics in the 1950s and early 1960s. While conservation had acquired a position within decision-making structures, it was by no means dominant, and it

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<sup>79</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 June 1961

did not have sufficient influence to prevail over a symbolic project that government presented as vital to Britain's future economic and technological prowess. The nuclear power programme was considered by government to be a matter of national interest and, as was made clear at Dungeness, 'special minority interests' would not be allowed to take precedence over 'the interests of the public as a whole'.<sup>80</sup> In order for environmental concerns to prevail in the post-war period, it was necessary that they did not conflict with dominant political priorities. As is shown in chapter three, clean air legislation was passed in 1956 because it was deemed to be in the national interest, both in terms of public health and economics. When set against nuclear power, the preservation of the countryside was not able to fulfil that requirement. The government's own National Parks policy was intended to prioritise conservation over industrial development, but at Trawsfynydd the commitment to the atomic energy programme ensured that this provision was easily overridden.

Nevertheless, environmental politics would continue to develop. As the next chapter shows, during the 1960s government was unable to ignore a range of problems, each of which arose as unwanted effects of modernisation and affluence, and the state increasingly stepped in to regulate the rural and urban environments. Crucially, environmental policies were presented as complementary to growth and prosperity, offering a means for facilitating the enhancement of the 'quality of life' of the British population.

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<sup>80</sup> TNA: POWE 14/1125, Dungeness Inquiry Transcript, Day One, p. 33

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Creation of the Department of the Environment**

In October 1970, the Conservative government of Edward Heath established the Department of the Environment (DOE), combining the functions of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG), the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Public Building and Works. Headed by the Secretary of State for the Environment, a position held by Peter Walker from 1970 to 1972, the department unified the three former ministries on the principle that it was ‘increasingly accepted that maintaining a decent environment, improving people’s living conditions and providing for adequate transport facilities all come together in the planning of development’. While the Secretary of State was given overall control and final responsibility for the decisions of the new department, junior ministers were given responsibility for Local Government and Development, Housing and Construction, and Transport Industries. The department’s powers largely applied to England, with responsibility for environmental administration in Scotland and Wales remaining with the Scottish and Welsh offices.<sup>1</sup>

The DOE was a creation of the Heath government, but it is important to note that Harold Wilson’s Labour government had been planning similar measures before losing power in the general election of June 1970. In October 1969, Wilson gave Anthony Crosland the new post of Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, with responsibility for coordinating the work of the MHLG and the Ministry of Transport. Crosland’s new department was focused on meeting the environmental challenges posed by town and country planning and the development of transport infrastructure, and Crosland was asked by Wilson to investigate how the

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<sup>1</sup> Minister for the Civil Service, *The Reorganisation of Central Government* (Cmnd. 4506, 1970), pp. 10-11



policy areas could be further integrated. This followed a number of administrative developments over the latter half of the 1960s, including amendments to town and country planning laws and the extension of National Parks legislation in 1968, and the creation of a standing Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in December 1969. The UK government also became increasingly involved in international discussions of environmental issues as the 1960s drew to a close.

Whereas existing studies have played down the importance of the DOE, it is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate that its creation was a significant moment in the development of environmental politics in Britain. While it could be seen simply as a functional change to the organisation of the civil service and the machinery of government, the establishment of the department reflects deeper shifts within British politics in the years leading up to 1970, and marks the culmination of the increasing state attention to the protection of the environment that is traced throughout this thesis, beginning with National Parks and town and country planning policy in the 1940s. Essentially, the creation of the DOE was an attempt to come to terms with two challenges that dominated discussion of the environment during the 1960s. First, how the continuing advance of motorised transport, and particularly private car ownership, could be squared with the aim of planning a healthy and pleasant urban environment, and second, how the problem of pollution to land, air and water could be addressed at levels ranging from the local to the international. In addition, government attention continued to fall on the challenge of protecting the countryside from development, advancing the work begun in the inter-war and post-war years, and that responsibility passed to the DOE on its creation in 1970.

During the 1960s, those challenges were increasingly viewed as ‘environmental’, and the term became established as the label for the policy areas that would eventually be

covered by the new department. Crucially, the 'environment' in British politics was conceptualised as comprising both rural and urban surroundings. While the country planning discussed in chapters two and four of this thesis continued to present problems, and was addressed through the passage of the Countryside Act in 1968, the spotlight in the 1960s was firmly upon urban planning, in particular the difficulty of incorporating the car into towns and cities. A clear link was made between improving the quality of surroundings, both in town and country, and improving the standard of living of the population. When the term 'environment' was used in British politics in the 1960s, it was usually with reference to the broad aim of raising the 'quality of life' of the British people. By the end of the decade, both the Labour and Conservative parties were increasingly speaking the language of the 'environment' and 'quality of life'. This did not represent a dramatic conversion to a new ecological politics, but rather a response to long-term and ongoing policy problems, and a reaction to individual events that highlighted the need for greater governance of the relationship between society and its natural and built surroundings. There was a connection to rising levels of affluence, as both main parties came to the view that the public expected government to do more than simply guarantee basic levels of material security and sanitation. Public health mattered, as it had when the Clean Air Act was passed in the 1950s, but so did aesthetics, mobility and the ability to enjoy leisure time. There is little evidence of government responding to a growing environmental social movement during the 1960s, but there is much evidence of a perception within government that the public increasingly demanded environmental policies that would raise their quality of life. In line with the central arguments of this thesis, the creation of the DOE demonstrates how environmental politics took shape in Britain not as part of an 'anti-industrial' reaction against the circumstances of modernity, but as an attempt to apply the

expertise of the state to the management of the problems associated with industrial and urban development. Where public demand fed into the process, it was in terms of a desire to enjoy the benefits of affluence, rather than a wish to curb the advancement of science and technology. In doing so, this chapter makes the case for reconsideration of the link between the 1960s and the politics of the environment in Britain, arguing that the key development of the decade was not the rise of radical activism, but rather the crystallisation of the 'environment' as a unified field of public policy, covering the problems of governance explored throughout this thesis. As in other chapters, the state and conventional political actors are repositioned at the heart of the story.

This chapter begins by analysing the approach of both Conservative and Labour governments to town and country planning in the early 1960s, particularly with reference to the challenge of traffic in towns. The focus in this chapter is on the implications of the problem for the machinery of central government, with the practical impact of motor vehicles on urban centres receiving more detailed coverage in chapter six. Next, the chapter turns to the problem of pollution, analysing developments at the official level alongside a more general rise in concern around the degradation of the environment. Here, it is shown how pollution events, particularly the *Torrey Canyon* oil spill in 1967, played a role in awakening public opinion and governmental concern. While government and political parties responded to public opinion, they also sought to shape it to their own advantage through adoption of the anti-pollution cause, and by the end of the decade environmental policies were seen as carrying potential electoral benefits. Within government, attention to the environment increased not only within domestic departments, but also within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), which played an active, if cautiously

sceptical, role in the shaping of an international environmental agenda. Finally, the chapter looks at how the governments of both Wilson and Heath responded to the environmental problems of the 1960s by making changes to the organisation of Whitehall departments. While political calculation naturally played a role, it is argued that the measures taken by both Labour and the Conservatives represented genuine attempts to address pressing environmental issues, and reflected personal concern among leading political actors that the environment was becoming a key challenge as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s.

### **The challenge of planning in the early 1960s**

As the 1960s began, planning retained its position as a central, if often loosely defined, principle within mainstream British politics. As Glen O'Hara notes, both Labour and the Conservatives placed their confidence in comprehensive, long-term planning, whether in terms of economic planning, the planning of health and welfare provision, or the continuing development of town and country planning mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> While the Conservatives had loosened the regulations on development charges in 1952, the party remained committed in principle to physical planning, establishing the concept of protected 'green belt' land as national policy in 1955, while Labour returned to power in 1964 committed to setting up a Land Commission with the purpose of collecting tax on profit made on land transactions, and facilitating the development of land for housing.<sup>3</sup>

In the countryside there was continuity with the themes examined in chapters two and four of this thesis, with the focus remaining on balancing development and

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<sup>2</sup> Glen O'Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment: Economic and Social Planning in 1960s Britain* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 2-3

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Hardy, *From New Towns to Green Politics: Campaigning For Town and Country Planning, 1946-1990* (London, 1991), p. 42; Glen O'Hara, *Governing Post-War Britain: The Paradoxes of Progress, 1951-1973* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 139-40

leisure with the preservation of the landscape and nature, while in towns and cities planning policy aimed to accommodate the needs of housing, commerce and industry, and secure a standard of living in keeping with rising post-war expectations. By the end of the 1950s, it was clear that the greatest challenge to successful urban planning was posed by one of the key symbols of rising affluence: private motor car ownership. The impact of the car will be expanded upon in chapter six, but for the purposes of the present chapter it should be noted that the problem had begun to preoccupy central government by the beginning of the 1960s. On 10 December 1959, Labour's transport spokesman, Anthony Wedgewood Benn, moved a motion in the Commons criticising the Conservative government for failing to tackle the growing problem of traffic in urban areas. Describing urban congestion as 'a problem which we all recognise to exist in the most critical form in all our cities', Benn called on the government to increase investment in transport, and to ensure that transport infrastructure was considered as one of the crucial components of the wider challenge of urban planning.<sup>4</sup>

Responding to Benn, the Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, admitted that the problem worried him 'a great deal', and acknowledged that transport needed to be tackled as part of town planning more generally. 'This is not merely a road engineering problem,' Marples told the House. 'It is a design for living in the fourth quarter of this century. We must come to terms with the motor car without letting it destroy our way of life. We cannot allow it to grind the amenities out of existence.' In order to investigate long-term solutions to the problem, Marples announced that he would appoint a study group 'to go not merely into the road programme, but to consist of architects and town planners, embracing both roads and amenities, to see

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<sup>4</sup> HC Deb, 10 December 1959, vol. 615, cols. 752, 763, 766-67

which way we are going and how we can come to terms with this problem'. This would be done 'before it is too late, and disaster overtakes us'.<sup>5</sup>

In the summer of 1960, Marples appointed the respected town planner Colin Buchanan to lead a Working Group 'to study the long-term development of roads and traffic in urban areas and their influence on the urban environment'.<sup>6</sup> Alongside Buchanan's Working Group, a Steering Group was appointed under Sir Geoffrey Crowther, and given the task of making public policy recommendations based on the eventual report. Buchanan's investigations took three years, and when the report, *Traffic in Towns*, was finally published in November 1963, its author was unequivocal about the implications of traffic for British towns and cities. Describing the problem as 'one of the most extraordinary facing modern society', Buchanan wrote that, unless a solution was found, 'either the utility of vehicles in towns will decline rapidly, or the pleasantness and safety of surroundings will deteriorate catastrophically'.<sup>7</sup>

In making recommendations for how towns and cities could be remodelled to accommodate mass car ownership (those recommendations will be covered more fully in chapter six), Buchanan argued that the town and country planning system lacked ambition and was failing to address the impact of vehicles in urban areas. As things stood, 'few of the statutory development plans really face up to the future problems of traffic and transport', yet 'the main creative opportunities for dealing with motor traffic will come in conjunction with the enormous task of urban reconstruction and expansion which faces this country'.<sup>8</sup> The policy implications were expanded upon by Crowther's Steering Group, which argued that planning

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., col. 771

<sup>6</sup> Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns: The Specially Shortened Version of the Buchanan Report* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 17

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 238, 247-48

needed to be conducted on a regional, rather than local, basis, with Regional Development Agencies coordinating the plans of local authorities, ensuring ‘that they are added up to a comprehensive and practical scheme for reconciling the car and the city – that is, for making it possible for traffic to move while keeping the city as a good place to live in’.<sup>9</sup>

*Traffic in Towns* received widespread media coverage, and prompted intense political debate. *The Times* described it as ‘a work of fundamental importance not only to this country but to every other ... where the growth in traffic threatens to destroy the urban environment’, and argued that Britain had no choice ‘but to embark, belatedly, on the creation of a new and better urban environment’.<sup>10</sup> At the political level, discussion centred on how the planning machinery could be adapted to meet the challenge of traffic, and there was acknowledgement that transport and town-planning policies required closer integration. On the day of the report’s publication, Marples noted that ‘planning of traffic and planning of land use must go together’, and announced that an Urban Planning Group had been created within Whitehall with the aim of closer cooperation between the Ministry of Transport and the MHLG.<sup>11</sup> When the Commons debated the Buchanan Report in detail on 10 February 1964, both the Conservative and Labour parties expressed their support for greater integration between transport and town planning. Marples told the House that the government accepted Buchanan’s analysis ‘that a balance must be struck between the needs of traffic and the other needs of urban life’, and stated that the MHLG and the Ministry of Transport would work together with local authorities to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15

<sup>10</sup> *The Times*, 28 November 1963

<sup>11</sup> HC Deb, 27 November 1963, vol. 685, col. 282

bring about 'a fantastic programme of development and redevelopment in Britain's towns and cities'.<sup>12</sup>

Speaking for Labour, George Strauss described the Buchanan and Crowther reports as 'brilliant and exciting documents' that had 'changed the thinking on one of the burning social problems of the day'. In expressing the opposition's support for the reports' recommendations, Strauss criticised the government's record on dealing with the traffic problem, and denounced its decision not to act on Crowther's recommendation of establishing Regional Development Agencies to coordinate planning within regions covered by multiple local authorities. 'The best way in which the government can show that they mean business,' Strauss argued, 'is to set up immediately the necessary planning machinery and provide it with the necessary power', yet that was the one thing the government had refused to do.<sup>13</sup> The Minister of Housing and Local Government, Keith Joseph, rejected this criticism, countering that Regional Development Agencies would 'shatter the integrated approach to land use and traffic planning which was preached by Buchanan throughout his Report'. They would, Joseph argued, be 'remote from local conditions, indirectly impersonal and would deaden local government initiative'.<sup>14</sup>

The debate over the impact of motor vehicles on towns and cities was central to the development of environmental politics in the early 1960s. Indeed, it was in this context that the word 'environment' began to acquire political currency, as it was used within discussion of the traffic problem to describe urban surroundings, and by extension the desirability of improving them. In his report Buchanan wrote of the need to find a 'convenient term' to 'convey the idea of a place, or an area, or even a

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<sup>12</sup> HC Deb, 10 February 1964, vol. 689, cols. 39, 44-47

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., cols. 57-58

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., col. 156



street, which is free from the dangers and nuisances of motor traffic'. While noting that it was 'clumsy', Buchanan suggested that 'the expression that immediately comes to mind is to say that the area has a good "environment"', and settled on it as the best term to use in his report.<sup>15</sup> Once the report became the subject of political discussion, the term 'environment' became common shorthand for what was at stake in seeking to reconcile the city and the car. In the February 1964 Commons debate, Marples spoke of the need 'to strike the right balance between traffic and environment', and argued that 'what is at stake is the sort of environment the majority of us should have in the future', while Joseph questioned the compatibility of 'universal access by car and a civilised urban environment', and stated that 'we have to balance the degree of accessibility by car against the degree of urban environment that we retain'.<sup>16</sup>

With the arrival of the 1964 election, the challenge of traffic in towns found its way into the party manifestoes. Labour promised that 'urgent attention will be given to the proposals in the Buchanan Report and to the development of new roads capable of diverting through traffic from town centres', while the Conservatives, in placing emphasis on improving 'quality of life', pledged to 'apply the principles of the Buchanan Report to comprehensive campaigns of town replanning'.<sup>17</sup> Following Labour's victory, the government of Harold Wilson began adjusting planning machinery in line with one of the key recommendations of *Traffic in Towns*, establishing regional Economic Planning Councils and Economic Planning Boards

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<sup>15</sup> Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns*, pp. 55-56

<sup>16</sup> HC Deb, 10 February 1964, vol. 689, cols. 39, 46, 149

<sup>17</sup> Labour Party, 'The New Britain' (1964), <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab64.htm> (accessed 28 September 2015); Conservative Party, 'Prosperity with a Purpose' (1964), <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1964/1964-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed 28 September 2015)

under the umbrella of a new Department of Economic Affairs.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the new Minister of Housing and Local Government, Richard Crossman, showed a keen interest in addressing the challenges of urban planning. In early 1965, Crossman appointed an advisory group on the subject chaired by the architect Richard Llewelyn-Davies, which reported that improved research into urban planning was required in order to meet ‘both the need and the opportunity for a complete re-appraisal of our concepts of cities and urban living’. With towns and cities facing ‘tremendous stresses under the impact of a population explosion, combined with a remorseless increase in traffic, rising standards of living, and rapid technological change’, the advisory group argued that there was an ‘urgent need for research in depth as a basis for the massive building [programme] which is now inevitable’.<sup>19</sup>

Together with the report of the Heyworth Committee on Social Studies, which recommended in June 1965 that planning research should be dealt with by a Planning Research Council, the report of Llewelyn-Davies’s advisory group appears to have prompted Crossman to mount a strong push for improved research into urban planning. As his diaries make clear, Crossman seized upon interest by the Ford Foundation in putting money into a UK-based institute for urban planning research, and he arranged a conference at Churchill College, Cambridge in August 1965, at which politicians, civil servants, planners and academics met to discuss ‘what form of planning research agency was needed’.<sup>20</sup> The outcome of the Cambridge conference was a commitment by the Ford Foundation to provide 40 per cent of the funding for

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<sup>18</sup> Evelyn Sharp, *The Ministry of Housing and Local Government* (London, 1969), p. 180; O’Hara, *Dreams to Disillusionment*, pp. 108-9

<sup>19</sup> The National Archives (TNA): HLG 116/279 Centre for Environmental Studies: Arrangements for Establishing Centre; Briefs (1965-66), Centre for Environmental Studies, Memorandum by the United Kingdom Government, 15 March 1966

<sup>20</sup> Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Volume One: Minister of Housing and Local Government, 1964-66* (London, 1975), pp. 228, 233, 237; TNA: HLG 116/279, Centre for Environmental Studies, Memorandum by the United Kingdom Government, 15 March 1966

a new institute, on the condition that the Exchequer provided the remaining 60 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

Having received the Ford Foundation commitment, Crossman set about convincing his Cabinet colleagues that the project was worth supporting. In a letter to the Minister of Economic Affairs, George Brown, Crossman wrote that he had 'long been convinced that entirely new arrangements' were required for research into the 'built environment'. Citing 'the housing programme, the building of new cities and towns, [and] the impact on the built environment of a fast growing, mobile population', Crossman argued that 'the enormous scale of the physical tasks facing us' demonstrated the need for new research arrangements, and asked Brown to lend his support to the proposal for a Ford-sponsored Centre for Environmental Studies. The Centre, which would be independent of government, would facilitate research and discussion around environmental planning, with its activities 'heavily concentrated on urban problems'.<sup>22</sup> Crossman succeeded in gaining the support of Brown's ministry, which noted that urban planning was 'an area in which we are generally backward and one where there was an urgent need for more work', as well as the support of Barbara Castle, the Minister for Overseas Development, who noted that the Centre could prove useful in serving the needs of developing countries.<sup>23</sup>

In March 1966, having secured the 60 per cent Treasury grant to complement the Ford Foundation's 40 per cent (he described this in his diary as 'the million-pound show I got out of the Treasury and Ford'), Crossman announced publicly that the Centre for Environmental Studies was being established, under the chairmanship of

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<sup>21</sup> TNA: FG 2/299 Interdepartmental Committee on Government Economic Research: Memoranda (1965-66), Centre for Environmental Studies, Memorandum by Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 26 Oct 1965

<sup>22</sup> TNA: EW 8/408 Committee on Economic Research: Proposal to Establish Centre for Environmental Studies (1965), Letter from Richard Crossman to George Brown, 25 Oct 1965

<sup>23</sup> TNA: EW 8/408 Minute from Frances Stewart to Mrs E.H. Boothroyd, 28 Oct 1965; TNA: EW 8/408 Letter from Barbara Castle to Richard Crossman, 1 Nov 1965

Llewellyn-Davies.<sup>24</sup> He told the Commons that new arrangements were ‘urgently needed to give an impetus to research in the environmental field’, as ‘the tasks of re-shaping existing towns, building new cities and meeting the needs of a fast-growing, mobile population all demand a vigorous, comprehensive and sustained research programme’.<sup>25</sup> The Centre received guaranteed funding for five years, and began its work in April 1967. It was based at the University of London, with Llewellyn-Davies as director. One of the Centre’s first acts was to set up a working group on ‘developing patterns of urbanisation’, in order to study ‘cultural, social, economic and geographical aspects of urbanisation, as well as developing patterns of transportation and administration’.<sup>26</sup> The Centre continued its work until the early 1980s, when the Thatcher government withdrew its funding.<sup>27</sup>

Crossman’s active interest in the establishment of the Centre for Environmental Studies is evidence of the direction in which political consideration of the environment was moving in the early and mid-1960s. The Buchanan Report had placed urban planning firmly on the political agenda in 1963, and it is significant that a figure as influential as Crossman was grappling with the issues covered by the report during his tenure as Minister of Housing and Local Government. The name of the new research centre points to how problems of urban planning were increasingly being conceptualised as ‘environmental’, and it is clear that transport had come to be seen as the key challenge in the management of the urban environment. The shift towards the integration of transport and urban planning as areas of government policy was underlined by the publication of a Ministry of Transport White Paper in 1966, which presented the transport policy challenge in terms of

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<sup>24</sup> Crossman, *Diaries*, p. 527

<sup>25</sup> HC Deb, 8 March 1966, vol. 725, cols. 466-67W

<sup>26</sup> Centre for Environmental Studies, *First Annual Report: April 1967 to March 1968* (London, 1968), p. 4

<sup>27</sup> HC Deb, 25 October 1979, vol. 972, cols. 287-88W

solving a paradox: while the rapid development of the motor car had brought ‘immense benefits to millions of people’, it had also brought ‘severe discomforts’ and it posed ‘a threat to our environment in both town and countryside which, if it continues unchecked, will ensure that the pleasure and benefit for which we use the car will increasingly elude us’. The answer, the White Paper suggested, lay in no longer approaching transport and planning in isolation – ‘town planning and transport planning must go hand in hand’.<sup>28</sup>

At the 1966 general election, both main parties went to the polls pledging to tackle the problems of town and country planning. The Labour Party placed ‘Building a New Britain’ at the heart of its manifesto, and promised to address the fact that ‘many of our urban centres are ill-designed and choked with motor traffic’, while also pledging to strengthen the protection of the countryside for recreation and leisure.<sup>29</sup> The Conservatives, meanwhile, committed themselves to addressing the urban transport problem and promised to ‘plan the coast and countryside in such a way as to increase their natural beauty’.<sup>30</sup> While it would be excessive to suggest that the environment had risen to the status of a major electoral issue, the presence of town and country planning in the 1966 manifestoes illustrates that environmental issues were growing in importance by the time Wilson’s government began its second term, and that trend would continue as the problem of pollution captured widespread public and political attention in the second half of the 1960s.

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Transport, *Transport Policy* (1966, Cmnd. 3057), pp. 1, 12

<sup>29</sup> Labour Party, ‘Time for Decision’ (1966), <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab66.htm> (accessed 30 September 2015)

<sup>30</sup> Conservative Party, ‘Action Not Words: The New Conservative Programme’ (1966), <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1966/1966-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed 30 September 2015)

## The fight against pollution

As previous chapters have shown, the regulation of environmental pollution in Britain long pre-dated the mid-1960s. However, it was at that time that pollution began to acquire significant purchase as a headline political issue. As is well documented in the literature on the global rise of environmentalism, the emergence of pollution as a political problem coincided with a discernible increase in public concern. It is common to view the publication in 1962 of *Silent Spring*, a polemical study of the environmental effects of the pesticide DDT by the American marine biologist Rachel Carson, as a key catalyst in awakening public opinion on pollution, and, certainly for opinion in the United States, it would be difficult to deny the book's impact. More than a million copies were sold in the US by the time of Carson's death in 1964, and the book's success, which saw it featured heavily in the US media, led to Carson testifying before a Senate subcommittee and President Kennedy's Science Advisory Committee.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond the US, *Silent Spring* was translated into 12 languages during the 1960s, and was published in Britain in 1963. Described in *The Times* as 'eloquent, sincere and alarming', the book captured the attention of politicians, and prompted a lengthy debate in the House of Lords in March 1963.<sup>32</sup> Having written a foreword for *Silent Spring*, along with the biologist Julian Huxley, Lord Shackleton called on the government to increase expenditure on research into the effects of pesticides, and 'to show themselves much more concerned than they have been hitherto'.<sup>33</sup> Responding

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<sup>31</sup> Eliza Griswold, 'How "Silent Spring" ignited the environmental movement', *New York Times Magazine*, 21 September 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/magazine/how-silent-spring-ignited-the-environmental-movement.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/magazine/how-silent-spring-ignited-the-environmental-movement.html?_r=0) (accessed 1 October 2015); Robin McKie, 'Rachel Carson and the legacy of *Silent Spring*', *Observer*, 27 May 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2012/may/27/rachel-carson-silent-spring-anniversary> (accessed 1 October 2015); Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 76-77

<sup>32</sup> *The Times*, 14 February 1963

<sup>33</sup> HL Deb, 20 March 1963, vol. 247, cols. 1135-36

for the government, the Minister for Science, Viscount Hailsham, noted that there was 'practically no way in which man has not altered his environment', and warned that pollution was 'one of the permanent and serious dangers of a scientific and technological society and one against which a scientific and technological society must learn to erect substantial defences'. While acknowledging that the use of pesticides was 'a most serious matter, to which all governments would be wise to pay continuous and serious attention', Hailsham defended the British record, arguing that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had been regulating pesticides effectively since the 1950s. He pointed in particular to the activities of a Working Party chaired by the government's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Solly Zuckerman, which had been established two years prior to the publication of *Silent Spring* in order to investigate the issue.<sup>34</sup>

While *Silent Spring* did serve to highlight the problem of environmental pollution in Britain, it was not until later in the 1960s that the subject truly rose to political prominence. In the British context the most high profile environmental event of the decade was the sinking of the *Torrey Canyon*, a Liberian-registered tanker which ran aground on the Seven Stones Reef, close to the Isles of Scilly, on 18 March 1967, and the resulting oil slick that polluted the beaches of Cornwall throughout the spring of that year. As the American author Richard Petrow notes in his contemporary account of the disaster, 'never before in history [had] any nation been confronted with an oil slick as large as the one that flowed from the *Torrey Canyon*'. At the time of her sinking, the *Torrey Canyon* was the 13th largest merchant vessel in the world, measuring 974 feet in length and 152 feet in width and carrying 120,000 tons of crude oil.<sup>35</sup> The ship was part of a new generation of 'super tankers', built to meet the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., cols. 1138-43

<sup>35</sup> Richard Petrow, *The Black Tide in the Wake of the Torrey Canyon* (London, 1968), pp. 12, 86

rising demand from booming American and European markets for crude oil from the Persian Gulf. As Edward Cowan, another contemporary chronicler of the disaster, points out, by the mid-1960s more than half of the cargo at sea around the world was crude oil, carried in ever-growing vessels, and with this came the increased risk of pollution in the event of an accident.<sup>36</sup> As long as such accidents did not occur, the risk remained abstract, but the sinking of the *Torrey Canyon* and the pollution of some 120 miles of Cornish (and, it must be noted, 50 miles of French) coastline served as a stark reminder of the danger posed to the environment by technological activity.

The *Torrey Canyon* spill was a major media event, dominating headlines over the week of the disaster, and remaining in the news during the following months, as the clean-up operation continued on the Cornish beaches. In its front-page headline on 28 March 1967, the *Daily Telegraph* called the *Torrey Canyon* slick the ‘Greatest peace time menace to Britain’, and the sense of the spill as a significant threat to the British coastal environment pervaded the national press during the first days and weeks of the crisis.<sup>37</sup> As it became apparent that the spill was serious and that the clean up would become a long-term challenge, attention turned to the actions of the Wilson government. In a brief section on the *Torrey Canyon* in his memoirs, published in 1971, Wilson acknowledged that the incident had posed a unique challenge, but suggested that ultimately all those involved in responding to the disaster ‘did a great job’.<sup>38</sup> This was not necessarily a depiction Wilson’s contemporaries would have recognised – many at the time suggested that the government’s response was hesitant

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Cowan, *Oil and Water: The Torrey Canyon Disaster* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 27; On the local memory of the *Torrey Canyon* disaster, see Anna Green and Timothy Cooper, ‘Community and exclusion: the *Torrey Canyon* disaster of 1967’, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2015), pp. 892-909

<sup>37</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 28 March 1967

<sup>38</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London, 1971), p. 386



and confused, and that criticism would prompt a debate over the country's ability to deal with unexpected environmental disasters.

From the beginning, the government's response was marked by indecision. The incident was first discussed in Parliament on Monday 20 March, when the Secretary of Defence Denis Healey appeared on behalf of the government. It was during this parliamentary debate that the Labour MP for Falmouth, John Dunwoody, first raised 'the possibility of setting fire to the wreck and destroying the oil on the reef', and he was told by Healey that the interests of the *Torrey Canyon*'s American-based owners, the Barracuda Tanker Corporation, would need to be taken into consideration. 'We are not in a position to be able to set fire to the ship,' Healey informed Dunwoody, 'until they give their agreement that this can be done.'<sup>39</sup> The government would later claim that the decision to bomb the *Torrey Canyon*, which was eventually taken on 28 March, was not delayed by legal considerations. In an April 1967 White Paper explaining its response to the incident, the Home Office insisted that 'neither legal nor financial considerations inhibited Government action at any stage'.<sup>40</sup>

However, that assertion is contradicted by Cabinet papers, which show that such considerations contributed to indecision around the bombing. Deliberating several options on 23 March, the Cabinet considered the advice of the Attorney General, who concluded that 'the legal position was complex' and suggested that 'it would be desirable to seek the concurrence of the foreign governments concerned' before deciding on the appropriate course of action. In the same Cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister also stated that 'action in respect of the oil at sea would remain the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence', while 'the Minister of Housing and Local Government would be responsible for answering questions in the House of

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<sup>39</sup> HC Deb, 20 March 1967, vol. 743, col. 1055

<sup>40</sup> Home Office, *The Torrey Canyon* (Cmnd. 3246, 1967), p. 3

Commons’.<sup>41</sup> That would change on Saturday 25 March, when Wilson put the Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in charge of the *Torrey Canyon* operation.

As it struggled to bring the disaster under control, the government came under intense criticism from opposition MPs, who suggested that hesitation was endangering Cornwall’s coast. John Nott, the Conservative MP for St Ives, questioned whether, if a British tanker had run aground near New York, the American president Lyndon Johnson ‘would still have been negotiating with the British owners ten days later’, while the Liberal MP for Bodmin, Peter Bessell, said that ‘the government has shown too much regard for legality and precedent’.<sup>42</sup> The media, meanwhile, played a leading role in propagating the idea that Wilson and his Cabinet had dithered. On 21 March the *Daily Mirror* noted that ‘no single government department seems to be responsible for fighting the oil pollution battle’, and on 31 March its leading article asked why the decision to bomb the ship had been taken so late.<sup>43</sup> On 22 March the *Telegraph* described the government response as ‘pathetic’, while on 27 March the *Guardian* said that ‘there is this constant feeling that the Government has fluffed the issue’.<sup>44</sup>

Despite its protestations to the contrary, it is clear from the documentary evidence that the government acted with a degree of confusion and hesitation in the immediate aftermath of the *Torrey Canyon* accident. It was not apparent which minister or department was in charge of the response, and a number of considerations, including legal concerns, delayed the decision to bomb the tanker. There was certainly no formal plan in place for dealing with such an incident. Speaking in the Commons on 10 April, John Nott pointed out that the disaster

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<sup>41</sup> TNA: CAB 128/42/15 Cabinet Conclusions (1967), Cabinet Conclusions, 23 March 1967, pp. 11-13

<sup>42</sup> Petrow, *Black Tide*, p. 105

<sup>43</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 22 March 1967, 31 March 1967

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 1967; *Guardian*, 27 March 1967

should have been foreseen, had the government heeded the ‘many warnings of the dangers of such pollution in the past’.<sup>45</sup> But *Torrey Canyon* was not foreseen, and the fact that there was no plan in place would suggest that, while pollution had been gaining increased attention over the course of the 1960s, at the time of the spill in 1967 it was not high on the political agenda and was not a key consideration in organising the machinery of government.

However, this would change in the late 1960s, as *Torrey Canyon* exposed weaknesses in governance and prompted prolonged reflection on the political procedures for tackling pollution problems. The Wilson government, while defensive of its handling of the *Torrey Canyon* crisis, showed an awareness that changes needed to be made in order to ensure that the country was better prepared for future environmental disasters. In November 1967 it set up a House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, and in December 1967 a sub-committee was appointed to consider the issue of coastal pollution. The Committee’s report, published in July 1968, began with a general condemnation of coastal pollution, stating that ‘to use the oceans as though they were the waste-pipe of the world ... ever capable of absorbing more oil and other noxious substances, is an unethical abuse of the natural environment which man shares with the flora and fauna’. The Committee expressed concern that the increasing size of oil tankers made further accidents more likely, unless ‘new methods ... can be found to diminish the hazards, and the best modern practices are more widely adopted’. The Committee was particularly critical of the lack of preparation for an oil spill as severe as the *Torrey Canyon*, expressing surprise that ‘no pre-laid plans were in existence in March 1967 for dealing with a disaster of the scale that then occurred’ and stating that ‘what now concerns us is to ensure that

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<sup>45</sup> HC Deb, 10 April 1967, vol. 744, col. 790

all reasonable steps are taken to forestall the next disaster – the likelihood of which continues to be very great’.<sup>46</sup>

The Committee was critical of the confusion at Cabinet level around the incident. It noted that Zuckerman, the government’s Chief Scientific Adviser, had made ‘the astounding assertion that he could not name a single Minister who had the responsibility’ for implementing changes in contingency planning following the disaster, and it recommended that in future ‘one Minister should be designated to take immediate charge of any major oil tanker disaster requiring emergency action by the Government’. It also advised that the government should work through the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organisation (IMCO) to bring about international action on tanker safety. The report concluded with a strong environmental message, describing ‘the land, the sea, the river and the estuaries’ as ‘part of that inherited treasure which each generation holds in trust for its own posterity’, and expressing hope that the report ‘may at least provide some reinforcement to the efforts of those who seek the fullest opportunities for Man to enrich and enjoy his environment’.<sup>47</sup>

In its official response to the Committee, published in January 1969, the government was defensive, arguing that ‘much of the criticism is ill-founded’. It reiterated its determination that ‘the lessons to be drawn from the incident should be learnt and applied’, and pointed out that action was being taken on three fronts – ‘international negotiations; domestic planning; and research’. Internationally, it stated that in May 1967 it had called ‘a special session of the Council of the IMCO to study problems arising from the disaster’, and noted that a number of issues were ‘now under study

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<sup>46</sup> Select Committee on Science and Technology, *Coastal Pollution: Report* (London, 1968), pp. 8-9, 26-27

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28, 43-44

by sub-committees of the IMCO'.<sup>48</sup> At the domestic level, the government said that it had taken steps to improve planning, both nationally and locally, and pointed out that a Ministerial Committee on Emergencies, chaired by the Home Secretary, had been established in April 1967. It rejected criticism of the multi-departmental approach to the *Torrey Canyon* disaster, insisting that 'it is important to retain flexibility in the methods for dealing with emergencies'. Concluding its response, the government stated that 'the *Torrey Canyon* marked the opening of a new chapter in the endeavours of this and other countries to deal with the problem of oil pollution', and promised that it would 'continue to give close attention to the problem of coastal pollution'.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the government's guarded response to criticism, it seems clear that the *Torrey Canyon* crisis shocked it into action on pollution, and genuine progress was made in relation to oil at sea. As John Sheail notes, at the international level it was successful in bringing about change through the IMCO.<sup>50</sup> In October 1969 amendments were made to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil, which tightened regulations on the routine discharging of oil by tankers, while in November 1969 a Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage was adopted, clarifying issues of legal responsibility for pollution at sea.<sup>51</sup> Domestically, there is much evidence to suggest that the Wilson government became more attentive to pollution in the years following the *Torrey Canyon* disaster, with a number of individual ministers taking a lead on the issue. One who took an active interest was Wayland Young, Lord Kennet, who served as Parliamentary Secretary in the

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<sup>48</sup> Home Office, *Coastal Pollution: Observations on the Report of the Select Committee on Science and Technology* (Cmnd. 3880, 1969), pp. 3, 8-9

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 16-18

<sup>50</sup> John Sheail, 'Torrey Canyon: the political dimension', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2007), p. 503

<sup>51</sup> Admiralty and Maritime Law Guide, International Conventions, <http://www.admiraltylawguide.com/interconv.html> (accessed 1 October 2015)

MHLG and was the son of Edward Hilton Young, the Conservative Minister of Health who had played a prominent role in the promotion of the preservation of the countryside in the 1930s (see chapter two). In July 1968, Kennet wrote to the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Anthony Greenwood, to suggest ‘the possibility of having some sort of enquiry into the adequacy of our arrangements for controlling the pollution of the human environment, right across the board’. It is difficult to measure public opinion on pollution during this period, but it is clear that there was a perception within government that the public demanded action. Citing the impact of *Torrey Canyon*, as well as concern over pesticides, agricultural fertilisers, industrial cyanide in rivers, and ‘possible changes in macroclimate caused by the heating of the atmosphere due to industry’, Kennet noted that ‘the public disquiet which is building up on this front can be seen week after week’, and argued that the government should appoint a wide-ranging public inquiry, perhaps in the form of a Royal Commission.<sup>52</sup>

In November 1968, Greenwood wrote to the Prime Minister to assure him that his Ministry was paying close attention to the problem. Greenwood informed Wilson of Kennet’s suggestions of a commission to review governmental arrangements, and added that he was in agreement.<sup>53</sup> By February 1969 an investigation into departmental responsibilities around pollution was being led by Zuckerman, and Anthony Crosland, at that point President of the Board of Trade, wrote to Greenwood to express his approval, stating that ‘the question is of such overwhelming importance as to justify setting up a really high-powered independent

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<sup>52</sup> TNA: HLG 127/1193 Pollution in the Human Environment: Proposals to Set Up a Committee or Other Body to Undertake a Study (1968-69), Minute from Lord Kennet to Minister of Housing and Local Government, 15 July 1968

<sup>53</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260 Control of Pollution of Human Environment: Parts 1 and 2 (1968-70), Minute from Anthony Greenwood to Prime Minister, 28 Nov 1968

Committee of Inquiry'.<sup>54</sup> Crosland received support from Edward Short, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who agreed that 'the question is of very great importance and merits consideration in the way [Crosland] suggests'.<sup>55</sup>

In November 1969, both Crosland, who by then had been appointed Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, and Fred Peart, Lord President of the Council, recommended the establishment of an independent commission.<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of December, Wilson agreed that a Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution should be established, alongside a central coordinating unit, staffed by government scientists, and an interdepartmental committee of civil servants, chaired by the Chief Scientific Adviser.<sup>57</sup> On 11 December, the Prime Minister informed the House of Commons of his decision, stating that the Royal Commission would be a permanent body that would 'advise on matters, both national and international, concerning the pollution of the environment; on the adequacy of research in this field; and the future possibilities of danger to the environment'.<sup>58</sup>

In the press, the establishment of the Royal Commission was viewed as a sign that politicians were paying increasing attention to environmental problems. The *Daily Telegraph* argued that Wilson's announcement was 'another indication that all political parties are going to make the "quality of life" and the measures they are proposing to improve it, a major feature of their election manifestoes', while the Conservative MP Bill Deedes, who would later become editor of the *Telegraph*, noted in a column that

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<sup>54</sup> TNA: HLG 127/1193, Letter from Anthony Crosland to Anthony Greenwood, 5 Feb 1969

<sup>55</sup> TNA: HLG 127/1193, Letter from Edward Short to Anthony Greenwood, 13 Feb 1969

<sup>56</sup> TNA: CAB 165/688 Working Party on the Coordination of Environmental Pollution Control: MISC 254 (1969), Paper from Office of Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, 12 November 1969

<sup>57</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260, Letter from Prime Minister's Office to Office of Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, 9 December 1969

<sup>58</sup> HC Deb, 11 December 1969, vol. 793, cols. 638-39

‘Environment has become an “in” word. What man is doing in his surroundings, and what sooner or later these surroundings may do to him is moving to the forefront of social policies, national and international.’<sup>59</sup> The evidence suggests that this was a fair interpretation. The institutional developments that had occurred by the end of 1969, including the creation of the Royal Commission and the central coordinating unit within Whitehall, reflected growing interest among influential figures within the Labour government, including the Prime Minister. At the Labour Party Conference in the autumn of 1969, Wilson used his speech to identify the environment as a problem ‘moving to the centre of the political stage’. He told his party that the challenge was two-fold: ‘to remove the scars of nineteenth-century capitalism ... that still disfigure so large a part of our land’ and to ‘make sure that the second industrial revolution through which we are now passing does not bequeath a similar legacy to future generations’.<sup>60</sup> For Wilson, this marked a noticeable shift in emphasis from the theme of ‘scientific revolution’ and ‘white heat’ that characterised the early years of his administrations.<sup>61</sup> Speaking at a party rally in Swansea in January 1970, the Prime Minister told his audience that pollution represented one of the key challenges of the new decade:

In the sixties the emphasis was on mounting the technological revolution so that Britain could pay her way. And that technological revolution will go on. In the seventies our task must be to deal with the effects of technology’s noxious by-products. Only this approach can make decent living possible.<sup>62</sup>

At Swansea, Wilson also set his position on pollution in terms of curbing the abuses of large industrial corporations. While ‘the polluters are powerful and organised’, ‘the

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<sup>59</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 11 December 1969

<sup>60</sup> Wilson, *Labour Government*, p. 706

<sup>61</sup> David Edgerton, ‘The “White Heat” revisited: British government and technology in the 1960s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1996), p. 56

<sup>62</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260, Prime Minister’s Speech to Labour Party Rally, Swansea, 10 Jan 1970



protesters, the anti-pollution lobby, are less organised, less powerful', and therefore 'the community must step in to redress the balance'.<sup>63</sup> Writing in the *New Statesman*, Anthony Howard expressed cynicism regarding Wilson's conversion to the cause of pollution control, suggesting that the Prime Minister 'didn't lose much time in hopping on to President Nixon's anti-pollution bandwagon', a reference to the US President's call in his 1970 State of the Union Address for more action to tackle pollution and secure the 'quality of life'.<sup>64</sup>

While Howard's scepticism may have had some justification, it should be noted that Wilson took umbrage, and instructed his staff to rebut the suggestion that he was merely following Nixon, urging them to cite his words and actions on pollution over the course of 1969 and 1970.<sup>65</sup> The Prime Minister was also defensive of his record on the environment when he responded at length to a report by the Standing Committee of The Countryside in 1970, the body behind a series of conferences on conservation and the environment that took place between 1963 and 1970. The report had argued that 'the machinery of Government for securing proper regard for the environment and the conservation of amenity needs improvement', a suggestion the Prime Minister objected to in a letter to the Committee's chairman, Lord Hayter:

My recent speeches will have left you in no doubt of the Government's firm determination to tackle the problems of the environment vigorously. A great deal has been done in the past in this country, and this is sometimes forgotten when people read of troubles in other parts of the world and the action which has to be taken there to catch up. There is a great deal more to be done in this country; but the controls we already exercise through, for

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<sup>63</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260, Prime Minister's Speech to Labour Party Rally, Swansea, 10 Jan 1970

<sup>64</sup> *New Statesman*, 30 January 1970

<sup>65</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260, Letter from Prime Minister's Office to Lord President's Office, 30 January 1970

example, our clean air and town and country planning legislation have put us well in advance of many other industrialised nations.<sup>66</sup>

While pointing to his establishment of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, Wilson also highlighted the passage of the Countryside Act of 1968, which, in addition to extending the powers of the National Parks Commission and renaming it the Countryside Commission, included a section that made it a statutory duty that ‘every Minister, government department and public body shall have regard to the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside’.<sup>67</sup>

In the wider Labour Party, there is evidence that the problem of pollution was growing in importance. Kennet played a leading role in promoting the issue, and in November 1969 he delivered a lecture on ‘Controlling our Environment’ to the Fabian Society, which was published as a Fabian pamphlet in 1970. Kennet suggested that ‘pollution of the environment has in the last few years begun to assume the look of world problem number one’, and argued that state action was the only option, unless society was ‘to turn away with a curse against industrial progress and democratic government’.<sup>68</sup> Kennet ended by placing pollution in the context of Labour politics, arguing that ‘since we care for the existence, the health, and the spiritual and emotional well-being of mankind, we must take this issue very seriously’.<sup>69</sup> That perspective was echoed in a pamphlet produced in 1970 by the Annual Conference of Labour Women, which pointed out that while the Labour Party had ‘always stressed the importance of economic development, we have never failed to lay equal stress on the social consequences – and opportunities – of that

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<sup>66</sup> PREM 13/3260, Governmental Responsibility for the Natural Environment: Report of the Ad Hoc Group on Governmental Responsibility for the Natural Environment, July 1969, pp. 5-6; PREM 13/3260, Letter from Harold Wilson to Lord Hayter, 17 March 1970

<sup>67</sup> *Countryside Act*, 1968, sec. 11

<sup>68</sup> Wayland Young, *Controlling Our Environment: Fabian Research Series 283* (London, 1970), pp. 1, 11

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20

development, and on its impact upon the quality of the human environment'.<sup>70</sup> The report concluded that 'the protection and enhancement of the environment [should] be treated as a major priority area for action and expenditure at all levels of government, and one that should not be deferred on the basis of untenable arguments concerning the balance of payments'.<sup>71</sup>

For its part, the Wilson government made efforts ahead of the 1970 election to portray itself as committed to tackling environmental pollution. In May 1970, Wilson asked Crosland to push forward with a planned White Paper on pollution so that it could be published before the dissolution of Parliament.<sup>72</sup> The Prime Minister took a personal interest in the White Paper, chairing a special ministerial meeting on 21 May, at which it was agreed that the document should be titled *The Protection of the Environment: The Fight Against Pollution*.<sup>73</sup> It was published on 28 May, with Crosland telling the press that 'pollution of the environment is one of the most serious and urgent problems which face our contemporary society':

We have already done much in Britain to limit and control it; this White Paper shows intense Government activity over a very wide field. But unless we do more, the problem must worsen with the continuous growth of industrialisation, population and living standards. ... It will cost money, it will require stricter controls over the polluters; and it will take time. This is not a problem which can be solved by rhetoric or simple dramatic gestures. It will be a long and protracted campaign, but one which I am sure a determined Government, backed by an informed public opinion, can win.

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<sup>70</sup> Annual Conference of Labour Women, *Pollution and Our Environment* (London, 1970), p. 3

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

<sup>72</sup> TNA: CAB 168/202 White Paper on Environmental Pollution (1970), Letter from Prime Minister's Office, to Office of Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, 11 May 1970

<sup>73</sup> TNA: CAB 130/460 Environmental Pollution: Meeting 1; Paper 1 (1970), Minutes of Meeting on Environmental Pollution, 21 May 1970

Following the White Paper's publication, *New Scientist* magazine described it as 'historic', on account of it marking 'the first time that government policy in any major field has been placed in a solid ecological framework'.<sup>74</sup> That framework was set out in the paper's introduction:

This White Paper is about man's impact on his environment, and specifically about the pollution of his environment. The degree of control we can exert over that pollution is a major factor in the quality of our civilisation. To exert a proper control, three things are needed. First, scientific and technological knowledge – knowledge of ecology, which is the science of the way the animal and vegetable worlds interact with each other and with the physical environment; and knowledge of the technology to control pollution at source. Secondly, we need the right framework of economic analysis and economic priorities. Thirdly, we need the right legal and administrative framework to translate priorities and decisions into action.<sup>75</sup>

Notably the White Paper, which outlined what the government was doing to regulate pollution of the air, land, rivers, lakes and sea, did not adopt an unquestioning stance on economic growth. It pointed out that the 'increase in material goods brings with it certain "diseconomies" in terms of health, amenity and the attractiveness of the environment', and argued that 'society must ... make a value judgement on how much it is prepared to spend on preserving and protecting the environment'. It concluded that pollution was not only an issue in cases where it endangered human health, but also where it undermined 'amenity and the enjoyment of life'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *New Scientist*, 4 June 1970

<sup>75</sup> Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning, *The Protection of the Environment: The Fight Against Pollution* (1970, Cmnd. 4373), p. 5

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 29

In the press, reaction to the White Paper was mixed. *The Times* called it ‘a balanced account of what is being done and what needs to be done’, but *The Economist* criticised it for lacking concrete policy proposals, and described it as a ‘pre-election offering’ that bore ‘a distinct resemblance to the Labour Party’s manifesto, published the day before’.<sup>77</sup> Given Wilson’s keen interest in publishing the White Paper before the election, *The Economist* surely had a point, and if it was indeed a piece of electioneering, it is significant that the Labour Party believed that pollution and the environment were issues on which votes could be won. *The Daily Telegraph* described ‘environment’ as one of the catchwords of Labour’s 1970 manifesto, which was entitled ‘Now Britain’s Strong – Let’s Make it Great to Live In’.<sup>78</sup> As Robinson has noted, 1970 was the first election at which all three major parties mentioned the environment as a policy area in their manifestoes.<sup>79</sup> Labour promised ‘a cleaner Britain’, arguing that ‘we must take far better care of our physical environment’, while the Conservatives devoted a whole section of their manifesto to the subject of ‘A Better Environment’, expressing a desire to build ‘a society in which material advance goes hand in hand with the deeper values which go to make up the quality of life’, and acknowledging that ‘the effects of technological change can sometimes lead to a deterioration in the natural environment’.<sup>80</sup> While it is highly unlikely that the environment had a significant impact on the outcome of the 1970 election – as *The Economist* predicted, it would be decided by ‘brass, not muck’ – opinion polling did suggest that the parties were correct to appeal to the electorate’s concerns about

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<sup>77</sup> *The Times*, 29 May 1970; *The Economist*, 30 May 1970

<sup>78</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 1970

<sup>79</sup> Mike Robinson, *The Greening of British Party Politics* (Manchester, 1992), p. 7

<sup>80</sup> Labour Party, ‘Now Britain’s Strong – Let’s Make it Great to Live In’ (1970), <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab70.htm> (accessed 2 October 2015); Conservative Party, ‘A Better Tomorrow’ (1970), <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed 2 October 2015)

pollution.<sup>81</sup> A February 1970 poll for the *Sunday Times* by the Opinion Research Centre found that 57 per cent of the British electorate were ‘in favour of taxes or prices going up if that was the only way to keep town and country clean and quiet and pleasant to live in’. Among the middle-classes, the proportion rose to two-thirds, which may reflect a postmaterialist dimension to rising interest in quality of life.<sup>82</sup>

As Britain went to the polls in June 1970, environmental pollution occupied an increasingly prominent place on the political agenda. The events of the 1960s, most noticeably the *Torrey Canyon* oil spill, had highlighted the risks of pollution, and, in parallel with increased public concern and media coverage, government was increasingly taking steps to address the problem. In their pitches to the electorate, both the Labour and Conservative parties were consciously speaking the language of the ‘environment’ and pollution control. However, pollution was not simply a national challenge – as has been noted, concern was growing on a global level, and the British government’s involvement in international discussion of the environment would contribute to its emergence as a domestic political issue.

### **The international dimension**

Towards the end of the 1960s, environmental problems emerged as a major subject for diplomatic discussion. The post-war period had seen the creation of a number of important international organisations concerned with nature conservation, including the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (1948) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (1961), both of which received backing from Julian Huxley, the first director-general of UNESCO.<sup>83</sup> United Nations (UN) interest in conservation and the environment grew during the 1960s, with the organisation first of a UNESCO

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<sup>81</sup> *The Economist*, 30 May 1970

<sup>82</sup> *Sunday Times*, 1 February 1970

<sup>83</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, pp. 38, 41

Conference on Man and the Biosphere in 1968, followed by the planning of a major UN Conference on the Human Environment, scheduled for Stockholm in 1972. There was also intergovernmental interest in the environment at a European level – in 1966 it was announced that 1970 would be designated European Conservation Year, with member states of the Council of Europe encouraged to organise their own events around the theme, as well as take part in a European Conference on Nature Conservation in Strasbourg in February 1970. In Britain, there was some scepticism within government departments as to the usefulness of these international initiatives, but, nevertheless, analysis of discussions over how to approach the events, in particular preparations for the 1972 UN conference, reveals that there was genuine interest among ministers and officials, and the FCO played an important role in the growth of interest in environmental problems within the British government in the late 1960s.

Ahead of European Conservation Year, members of the Council of Europe were asked to produce reports covering the four themes of the Man and His Environment conference: the impact of urban conglomeration, the impact of industry, the impact of agriculture and forestry, and the impact of leisure pursuits.<sup>84</sup> Within the British government, responsibility for coordinating the production of the reports fell to the MHLG, and while Lord Kennet, unsurprisingly, showed interest, officials were less enthusiastic, with one complaining that '[the reports] are not very easy to do, the length required being too short to enable anything to be said that is not pretty shallow, and too long for the normal platitudes'.<sup>85</sup> In public the government showed enthusiasm for the initiative, with Arthur Skeffington, a junior minister in the MHLG, telling the Commons that, as 'the whole future quality of environment may

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<sup>84</sup> TNA: HLG 142/145 European Conservation Year 1970: Consideration of British Response (1969), Council of Europe Memorandum, 22 November 1968

<sup>85</sup> TNA: HLG 142/145, Minute from Jean Hope-Wallace to Mr Pryce, 24 February 1969

suffer damaging consequences because of the increasing pressures', he thought 'European Conservation Year 1970 may make a notable mark in man's endeavour to master mass materialism'.<sup>86</sup> However, privately there were reservations as to what could be achieved. An internal note within the Ministry stated that while the UK would 'continue to endorse and support the original concept of a once-for-all European Conservation Year as a means for awakening and focussing public interest', it did 'not wish sweeping recommendations for continuing Council of Europe activities to be endorsed at the conference'.<sup>87</sup>

Preparations for the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment prompted similar reservations. The conference was proposed by the Swedish government in July 1968, partly as a response to concern regarding the effects of acid rain in the Scandinavian region.<sup>88</sup> At the UN General Assembly in December 1968, Resolution 2398 was adopted, which noted 'that the relationship between man and his environment is undergoing profound changes in the wake of modern scientific and technological developments', and 'that increased attention to the problems of the human environment is essential for sound economic and social development'. The resolution fixed a Conference on the Human Environment for 1972, and requested that the UN Secretary-General, U. Thant, should produce a report on environmental problems as part of the preparations for the conference.<sup>89</sup>

Thant's report, published in May 1969, provides an indication of the direction in which discussion of the environment was moving in the late 1960s. '[For] the first time in the history of mankind,' the report stated, 'there is arising a crisis of world

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<sup>86</sup> HC Deb, 10 March 1969, vol. 779, col. 1138

<sup>87</sup> TNA: HLG 142/145, Council of Europe Conservation Conference – Note for the Secretary of State, undated

<sup>88</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. 91

<sup>89</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2398, 'Problems of the human environment' (3 December 1968), <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/23/ares23.htm> (accessed 3 October 2015)



wide proportions involving developed and developing countries alike – the crisis of the human environment.’ There were ‘three basic causes’ of the crisis – ‘accelerated population growth, increased urbanisation, and an expanded and efficient new technology, with their associated increase in demands for space, food and natural resources’ – and if those causes were not addressed ‘the future of life on earth could be endangered’. It was therefore urgent, Thant wrote, that states worked together to ‘meet the need for intensified action at the national, regional and international level’.<sup>90</sup>

When Sweden put forward the idea of a UN conference in July 1968, the British response was unenthusiastic. Correspondence between the FCO and the MHLG reveals that the UK ‘tried unsuccessfully to deter the Swedes’ from proposing a conference to the General Assembly, and the FCO policy was that, while the environment was ‘an interesting and important topic’, a UN conference was not ‘the most effective approach to the problem’. British delegates to the UN were instructed to argue against holding a conference, and the UK only agreed to support the proposal once it became apparent that Sweden had significant support from other states, including the United States.<sup>91</sup>

Britain’s attitude towards the Swedish proposal would suggest that there was little enthusiasm for the international discussion of environmental issues, yet the UK had actually put forward a similar proposal for a UN conference on the environment in the previous year. In March 1967, in response to plans for a UN Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, the FCO decided to propose as an alternative a series of UN conferences on the ‘preservation and modification of the

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<sup>90</sup> TNA: FCO 55/218 United Nations Conference on Problems of the Human Environment 1972 (1969), ‘Problems of the Human Environment’, Report of the Secretary General, 1 May 1969

<sup>91</sup> TNA: FCO 61/554 Problems of the Human Environment (1968), Steering Committee on International Organisations, 23rd Session of the UN General Assembly, Item 91, ‘Problems of the Human Environment’, Note by the Foreign Office, 21 Oct 1968

environment'.<sup>92</sup> In April Sir William Penney, Britain's representative on the Secretary-General's Science Advisory Committee, wrote to U. Thant to advance the UK's suggestion, and in December Lord Caradon, the UK Ambassador to the UN, put the proposal to the President of the General Assembly.<sup>93</sup> It was the British view, wrote Caradon, that the environment was 'a matter which should be given high priority':

My delegation is of the opinion that in order to facilitate coordination and focus the interest of member countries on the extremely complex problems related to human environment it would be most useful to arrange a conference on this matter under the auspices of the United Nations.<sup>94</sup>

According to the FCO, the 1967 British proposal 'aroused little interest', and was eventually dropped.<sup>95</sup>

Once the Swedish proposal was adopted, and planning for the 1972 Stockholm Conference had begun, there remained some scepticism and caution with the FCO, but there is also evidence that there was genuine enthusiasm for tackling environmental problems. In keeping with the wider British approach to international discussions, much emphasis was placed on the need to protect national interests, and UK delegates to the Preparatory Committee for the Conference were instructed to 'play a constructive role' while seeking 'to prevent the emergence of declarations contrary to our political and commercial interests'. Yet, at the same time, there were plans within the FCO for Britain to propose a UN Declaration of Principles of the Human Environment, as an initiative to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the

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<sup>92</sup> TNA: FCO 55/9 Brief for the United Nations on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy (1967-68), Notes of a Meeting of the International Scientific Relations Division, 20 March 1967

<sup>93</sup> TNA: FCO 55/9, Letter from W.G. Penney to U. Thant, 28 April 1967

<sup>94</sup> TNA: FCO 55/9, Letter from Lord Caradon to President of the General Assembly, undated

<sup>95</sup> TNA: FCO 55/218, Cabinet, Official Committee on Science and Technology, Note by the F.C.O., 14 March 1969

founding of the UN, and a draft declaration was drawn up.<sup>96</sup> This text recognised ‘the interdependence of man and his environment’ and made a call for intergovernmental action:

All states have a common interest in the conservation of the natural resources of the Earth and in improving the physical and social environment, and have a responsibility, both individual and collective, to prevent the wastage of these resources and to take all necessary action to improve the environment.<sup>97</sup>

While the plan for a unilateral UK initiative was dropped when it was realised that many other states had the same idea ahead of the Stockholm Conference, work on the proposed declaration reflected an increase in activity and interest around environmental issues within the FCO.<sup>98</sup> In November 1969 a Human Environment desk was established within the Science and Technology Department of the FCO, with an officer given full-time responsibility for the subject.<sup>99</sup> In January 1970 Lord Chalfont, an FCO minister, invited a delegation from the Royal Society to discuss the subject, and told them that ‘there was now a general recognition that the conservation of the human environment ... constituted one of the greatest challenges to modern society’.<sup>100</sup> This view appears to have been shared by the Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, who wrote to Crosland in November 1969 saying, ‘You will know how pleased I am by the priority being given to the problems

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<sup>96</sup> TNA: FCO 55/429 Preparations for 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment: UK Initiative for Draft Declaration on Human Environment (1970), The United Nations: a UK Initiative, 7 April 1970

<sup>97</sup> TNA: T 341/103 Official Committee on Environmental Pollution: Correspondence (1969-70), United Nations Declaration of Principles on the Human Environment: Draft Outline, 18 Feb 1970

<sup>98</sup> TNA: FCO 55/429, The United Nations: a UK Initiative, 7 April 1970

<sup>99</sup> TNA: FCO 55/220 United Nations Conference on Problems of the Human Environment 1972 (1969), Background Notes for Meeting between Lord Chalfont and Lord Kennet, 5 Nov 1969

<sup>100</sup> TNA: FCO 55/381 Meetings with Royal Society to Discuss the Human Environment (1970), Record of Meeting Between the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the President, Officers and Representatives of the Royal Society, 13 January 1970

of controlling environmental pollution.’ Stewart wrote that it was important for Britain ‘to play a positive and imaginative role in international discussion of these new problems’, and in order ‘to be positive abroad, we must of course be suitably organised at home’. He therefore praised the government’s recent attention to the problem of pollution at the domestic level.<sup>101</sup>

It is therefore clear that, while there was some scepticism towards the UN Conference, and much pragmatic consideration of how best to protect British interests, there was genuine enthusiasm within the FCO for engaging with the environmental efforts that had acquired a prominent position in intergovernmental activity by the end of the 1960s. The attitude of the Foreign Secretary and his department was in keeping with that of other prominent figures in the Labour government, including the Prime Minister. In April 1970, Wilson gave a speech to the United Nations Association in York, in which he espoused the virtues of international cooperation on the environment:

We need a new charter of international rights – and obligations. This is how it might read. All States have a common interest in the beneficial management of the natural resources of the Earth. All States should cooperate in the prevention or control of physical changes in the environment which may jeopardise the quality of human life, and which may endanger the health or the survival of animals or plants.<sup>102</sup>

By 1970, the environment had found a place in both domestic and foreign policy, and changes enacted by both Labour and Conservative governments would ensure that the new policy area became enshrined in the machinery of British government.

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<sup>101</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3260, Letter from Michael Stewart to Anthony Crosland, 25 November 1969

<sup>102</sup> TNA: FCO 55/429, Prime Minister’s Address to Annual General Meeting of the United Nations Association in York, 18 April 1970

## **Towards the Department of the Environment**

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, from the late 1950s and early 1960s there was growing awareness among British policymakers that town and country planning and the planning of the transport network, particularly in relation to roads and the effect of traffic on urban centres, posed problems that called for an integrated approach within Whitehall. Looking back on her time at the MHLG, where she served as permanent secretary between 1955 and 1966, Dame Evelyn Sharp noted that it became ‘quite impossible to deal with town planning in isolation from transport planning’, as the latter developed into the ‘major preoccupation of the land-planner’.<sup>103</sup> As has been discussed, the Buchanan report brought the issue to public attention in 1963, and Richard Crossman made efforts to promote a more integrated approach during his time as Minister of Housing and Local Government, but, by the late 1960s, the problem essentially remained unsolved, with responsibility for transport planning covered by the Ministry of Transport, and responsibility for town and country planning by the MHLG.

A major step towards integration was taken in October 1969 when Anthony Crosland was appointed as Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning. While the Ministry of Transport and the MHLG remained separate, Crosland was given responsibility for coordinating their work and representing the two ministries at Cabinet. This decision followed the publication of the report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England in June 1969, which had recommended that ‘one authority should be responsible for land-use planning and the whole field of transportation’, in order to ‘tackle the tremendous problems created by the rapid growth in personal mobility’. With greater integration, the report

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<sup>103</sup> Sharp, *Ministry of Housing and Local Government*, pp. 21, 138

concluded, it would 'be possible for the various problems of the *environment* to be grappled with as a whole'.<sup>104</sup> Addressing the Commons on 13 October 1969, the Prime Minister noted the report's 'clear conclusion that in the modern world ... the range of decisions concerned with planning, land use and transport, social and environmental development cannot, in practice, be separated', and announced that the new Secretary of State would direct a more integrated approach.<sup>105</sup> Crosland was also given responsibility for coordinating action on environmental pollution, and asked to make proposals to Wilson on any changes the government should make in that area (this would lead to the creation of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in December 1969).

It should be noted that, by this stage, the word 'environment' was frequently being used as a term that encapsulated the various problems of transport and town and country planning, as well as the risks posed by pollution. Once the decision had been taken to appoint Crosland in an 'overlord' role overseeing the Ministry of Transport and the MHLG, there was discussion within Whitehall as to the title that the new Secretary of State should be given. In September 1969 the head of the civil service, William Armstrong, recommended that Wilson use the title 'Secretary of State for Local Government and Environmental Planning', as it 'embraces both the physical and infrastructure aspects of the role, and those such as pollution control and amenity which touch on the quality of life'.<sup>106</sup> This title was adopted in draft press

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<sup>104</sup> Royal Commission on Local Government in England, *Volume 1: Report* (1969, Cmnd. 4040), pp. 65, 143

<sup>105</sup> HC Deb, 13 October 1969, vol. 788, col. 33

<sup>106</sup> TNA: AT 1/2 Appointment of a Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning (1969), Minute by Sir William Armstrong, 30 September 1969

releases announcing the creation of the post, but by 5 October the title had changed to Local Government and Regional Planning.<sup>107</sup>

The appointment of Crosland did not mark the end of the Labour government's work towards integrating transport and town and country planning. The Ministry of Transport and the MHLG were kept separate for the moment, but as part of his new role Crosland was asked by Wilson to report 'on the changes which, in his view, should be made at a later date with a view to creating a more integrated Department'.<sup>108</sup> In February 1970 an inter-departmental group was appointed to investigate, and its report, submitted to the Prime Minister in May, concluded that the overlap between the Ministry of Transport, the MHLG, and the Ministry of Public Building and Works (which had also been added to the review) was so extensive that 'the integration envisaged can be achieved only by investing a single Minister with the statutory and other powers and responsibilities over a broad functional area'. While the report acknowledged that the challenge of operating a large integrated department would be formidable, it concluded that a unified department was 'the only practicable means of achieving the objective'.<sup>109</sup> On 17 June, the day before the general election, Armstrong advised the Prime Minister that he should proceed with integration, and proposed three possible titles for the new department: the Department of Planning, the Department of Development, and the Department of the Environment.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> TNA: AT 1/2, Draft Press Notice, 2 October 1969; TNA: AT 1/2, Press Notice, Machinery of Government Changes, 5 October 1969

<sup>108</sup> HC Deb, 13 October 1969, vol. 788, col. 34

<sup>109</sup> TNA: AT 1/5 Machinery of Government Review: Correspondence and Papers (1969-70), Machinery of Government – Report on the Possibilities of Further Integration of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government and the Ministry of Transport, May 1970

<sup>110</sup> TNA: PREM 13/3241 Changes in Machinery of Government: Further Integration of Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Housing; Part 3 (1969-70), Minute from Sir William Armstrong, 17 June 1970

Labour's defeat at the election, and the arrival of Heath's Conservative government, did not alter the course towards an integrated department. In their manifesto, the Conservatives had promised to 'improve the machinery of government' in order to tackle environmental problems, and Heath quickly pushed ahead with this plan.<sup>111</sup> The Queen's Speech on 2 July 1970 was the first ever to mention the environment, with the monarch telling Parliament that her government would 'intensify the drive to remedy past damage to the environment and ... seek to safeguard the beauty of the British countryside and seashore for the future'.<sup>112</sup> In the debate that followed, Wilson, now speaking as leader of the opposition, revealed that he had taken the decision while he was Prime Minister to integrate transport, housing, planning and local government within one department, and asked the new Prime Minister whether he intended to do the same.<sup>113</sup> Heath replied that he would be conducting a wide review of government departments, and would in time be making an announcement regarding 'ministerial responsibility for the environment'.<sup>114</sup>

While it formed part of a wider review of the machinery of government, framed as a Conservative exercise in streamlining a government that had 'been attempting to do too much', the Heath government's work on the integration of transport and town and country planning was essentially a continuation of the process begun under Labour.<sup>115</sup> In early July 1970, Heath asked Armstrong to conduct a review into the machinery of government, and at the end of August a report was submitted to the Prime Minister that recommended a merging of the MHLG, the Ministry of

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<sup>111</sup> Conservative Party, 'A Better Tomorrow' (1970), <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1970/1970-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed 2 October 2015)

<sup>112</sup> HC Deb, 2 July 1970, vol. 803, cols. 46, 48

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., col. 58

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., col. 93

<sup>115</sup> Cmnd. 4506, p. 3



Transport and the Ministry of Public Building and Works.<sup>116</sup> The report began by outlining ‘the concept of the environment as a unified field of policy’. It argued that ‘governmental responsibility for environmental questions has been accepted for many years’, and explained how this had expanded over the years from ‘the relatively narrow base of preventing the spread of disease and ensuring minimum standards of housing into a wider responsibility for planning the future development of living conditions as a whole’. With the rise of the car, ‘the planning of roads [had] become a major consideration, just as closely linked with the general future of the environment as the public health/housing/town and country planning of MHLG’, and as such the integration of departments was ‘the next evolutionary step ... in relating the various aspects of the human environment in Britain to each other’. While this would obviously involve a reorganisation of Whitehall departments, the report argued that it would amount to more than a simple change to the machinery of government:

The desired effect is not a mechanical one but rather a behavioural one: a whole range of attitudes and patterns of work and behaviour would be affected thereby, and the evolution and operation of a broadly conceived environmental policy and a coherent set of programmes in the environmental field would become possible.<sup>117</sup>

The proposed merging of the three ministries was accepted by Heath, but there remained the question of what to call the new department. While the government would eventually settle on ‘Department of the Environment’, this did not happen without debate. A list provided by the Civil Service Department at the beginning of

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<sup>116</sup> TNA: AT 1/17 Review of Departmental Responsibilities – The Environment: Drafts of Review and Correspondence (1970), Letter from Sir William Armstrong to Sir David Serpell, 3 July 1970

<sup>117</sup> TNA: AT 1/17, Review of Departmental Responsibilities – The Environment, 28 Aug 1970

October suggested 21 possible names for the department, including ‘Environment’, ‘Infrastructure’, ‘The Physical Environment’, ‘Town and Country’, ‘Housing and Development’, ‘Planning and the Interior’, and ‘Urban and Environmental Planning’<sup>118</sup>. At a ministerial meeting at Sunningdale in early October, Heath invited his colleagues to suggest ‘a better term than “Environment”’, while on 5 October an official attempted to persuade him of its virtues, arguing that, while it was ‘a rather technical, jargon-like word’, it was ‘sufficiently imprecise to cover the full range of the new Department’s work, and it is tied in conveniently with the fashionable concept of “concern for the environment”’.<sup>119</sup> The Prime Minister was apparently not convinced, as ‘Department of the Environment’ only appears to have been settled for on 9 October, just one week before the department’s creation was announced publicly, when officials were informed ‘that at present [the Prime Minister] has no better ideas on the name’.<sup>120</sup> This discussion over possible names is worth noting, as while ‘environment’ was clearly becoming widely used an umbrella term for describing the policy areas and challenges that would be covered by the new department, it was not yet being used without question in political circles.

On 15 October, the government published a White Paper, *The Reorganisation of Central Government*, which announced the creation of the DOE, as well as a number of other changes, including the merging of the Department for Overseas Development with the FCO. The White Paper stated that ‘it is increasingly accepted that maintaining a decent environment, improving people’s living conditions and providing for adequate transport facilities all come together in the planning of development’, and explained that, in England, ‘the Ministries of Housing and Local Government, of

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<sup>118</sup> TNA: PREM 15/73 Review of Departmental Responsibilities; Reorganisation of Central Government; Part 4 (1970), Possible names for the Environmental Department, 1 Oct 1970

<sup>119</sup> TNA: PREM 15/73, Name of the ‘Environment’ Department, 5 October 1970

<sup>120</sup> TNA: PREM 15/73, Minute to Mr Gilbraith, 9 Oct 1970

Public Building and Works and of Transport will be unified in a single Department of the Environment, under a Secretary of State'. While the Secretary of State would be in charge of the department, his role would be primarily strategic, with the everyday functions of the department delegated to a Minister for Local Government and Development, a Minister for Housing and Construction, and a Minister for Transport Industries. The responsibilities of the department would include the correlation of urban and transport planning, housing policy, developing and coordinating policies for the control of environmental pollution, and the conservation of the countryside.<sup>121</sup>

With the formation of the DOE, the environmental anxieties of the 1960s, particularly in relation to life in urban centres, became institutionalised in the structure of the British government. The problem of how to deal with the impact of traffic in towns had occupied both Conservative and Labour governments, and the reforms instituted by Wilson, and completed by Heath, were an acknowledgement that transport and town and country planning could no longer be treated as separate areas of policy. As will be discussed further in chapter six, the development of environmental politics in Britain cannot be understood without reference to the challenges posed by the onset of near-universal car ownership.

## **Conclusion**

When the DOE formally began its work in November 1970, the new Secretary of State, Peter Walker, issued a message to all Department staff outlining the challenge ahead:

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<sup>121</sup> Cmnd. 4506, pp. 10-11

The tasks before us are complex and demanding. The reward is to make the country a better place for people to live, work and enjoy themselves. ... Our new Department is the most concerned with improving the quality of living in this country. The happiness of each individual family will be very much affected by our decisions and by our actions.<sup>122</sup>

The concern for 'quality of life' that Walker emphasised in his message lay at the heart of the development of environmental politics through the 1960s. Environmental policies were not exclusively dominated by anthropocentric concerns – wildlife conservation played its part in pollution control, for example – but ultimately people's living conditions were the key factor in determining the growth of state regulation and alterations to the machinery of government. As the phrase 'quality of life' indicates, this was partly a case of meeting the public's expectations in an era of rising affluence. To put it in terms of Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism, it appeared that the public had come to demand more than the satisfaction of their basic material needs, and it was expected that government policy would facilitate access to greater levels of comfort and convenience. In line with the cases explored in earlier chapters of this thesis, such as National Parks, town and country planning, and clean air, this did not amount to an 'anti-industrial' rejection of modernity and materialism, and with it a radical abandonment of the pursuit of economic growth. Affluence required continued growth, but its enjoyment was increasingly seen as necessitating clean and amenable surroundings. By enacting policies intended to secure such surroundings, both in rural and urban settings, the British government played a central role in the development of the politics of the environment. Such a

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<sup>122</sup> TNA: AT 1/34 Initial Organisation of Department of the Environment (1970), Secretary of State's Message to the Staff on Vesting Day, 10 November 1970

picture contrasts starkly with accounts of environmental politics that have foregrounded the contribution of radical social movements.

However, it is important to note that political change was driven not only by affluence, but also by serious objective problems. The challenge of traffic in towns, for example, may have had its roots in technological progress and growth, but its implications were far from trivial, raising serious questions around the future of urban life. Similarly, the 1967 *Torrey Canyon* oil spill may not have threatened most people's social and economic security (with the exception of those reliant on the Cornish tourism and fishing industries), but the sight of beaches covered with crude oil was shocking, and efforts to deal with the pollution exposed weaknesses in existing structures of government. At the international level, concern around such major pollution events played a key role in UN discussions, and tied into a growing sense that technological advances and the rise in global population posed a genuine threat to the ecosystem. In Britain during the 1960s a range of pre-existing challenges came to be conceptualised as 'environmental', and the term crystallised as the label for a unified field of governance. When the DOE was created, officials in government noted that they were making a conscious effort to shape 'a broadly conceived environmental policy'. All of the problems examined in this thesis – countryside preservation, the challenge of urban planning, and the pollution of air, land and water – were characterised as problems of the environment, and responsibility for their regulation fell to the new department.

By the end of the decade, the environment was established within the political mainstream. As its inclusion in both the Conservative and Labour manifestoes in 1970 suggests, there was remarkably little party disagreement around the rise of the environment as a political issue, with both parties accepting that quality of life lay

within the purview of the British state. In part, this stemmed from a perception that public opinion demanded environmental policies. Ministers and officials frequently spoke of the environment as an issue of public concern, a view influenced to a large extent by the growth in media coverage of environmental problems. However, it is important to acknowledge that there was also genuine interest among some of the most prominent political actors of the 1960s. The Conservative Minister of Transport Ernest Marples commissioned the Buchanan Report in response to growing concern around traffic in towns, and under Labour the issues of transport and town planning were picked up by Richard Crossman, who actively pursued the goal of establishing a Centre for Environmental Studies. In the second half of the 1960s Lord Kennet enthusiastically promoted the cause of pollution control within the MHLG, and, by the end of the decade, both Harold Wilson and Anthony Crosland were paying regular attention to the issue. Wilson's public statements and correspondence point to a keen awareness of environmental problems, and while he may of course have been pursuing such issues to satisfy public opinion (an accusation that was levelled at him in the press), it would be wrong to discount the possibility that his concern was rooted in a sincere conviction that government had a responsibility to act. Despite some scepticism, there was also clear interest within the FCO, and when the Conservatives returned to power in 1970, Edward Heath continued the work that had been begun under Labour. As with Wilson, Heath's political decisions, in particular the creation of the DOE, were in line with his public pronouncements. In October 1970, Heath told the third and final conference of The Countryside in 1970 that 'the protection of our countryside, the avoidance of pollution, and the striking of a right balance between the needs of conservation and development are now among the most important and difficult tasks of government'.

Environmental policies, he added, were ‘among the highest priorities of the seventies’, and ‘essential for any decent sort of living’.<sup>123</sup>

It was by no means clear how effective the state would be in addressing environmental problems in the years ahead, but by 1970 both the Conservative and Labour parties had indicated that the environment would form a part of their approach to governance. That approach was not radical – as Heath’s comments to The Countryside in 1970 conference indicated, economic development would remain a key priority – but with the creation of the DOE, the third largest Department in Whitehall, major policy areas, including transport and town and country planning, were to be considered within the framework of ‘the environment’. The emergence of that framework was key to the development of environmental politics in the years leading up to 1970, as it created the political space for debating the proper balance between economic development and the maintenance of clean and amenable surroundings. That new political battleground is explored further in the following chapter, which focuses on urban motorways and the search for a satisfactory solution to the problem of traffic in towns.

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<sup>123</sup> The Countryside in 1970, *Proceedings of the Third Conference: October 1970* (London, 1970), pp. 166-68

## **Chapter Six**

### **Urban Motorways and the Greater London Development Plan**

As was discussed in chapter five, the growth in the number of motorised vehicles on Britain's roads posed one of the most significant environmental challenges of the post-war period. As the motor car progressed from being a luxury purchase to one that the majority of households aspired to make, demand grew for the construction of an improved road network, while anxiety spread over the potential negative impact of rising volumes of traffic. In the immediate post-war years, the emphasis was upon the need to construct specialised highways, i.e. motorways, to connect the country's towns and cities, but by the early 1960s the public and political focus had shifted on to traffic within urban centres, in particular the social and economic consequences of serious congestion, and the question of what action could be taken to reconcile towns with mass ownership of cars.

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the implications of this problem for the machinery of government. The motor car was key to the realisation that transport and urban planning needed to be handled in unison, and, together with pollution, traffic played a major role in awakening government to the political saliency of environmental issues, leading to the creation of the Department of the Environment in 1970. This chapter looks in greater detail at the social and environmental impact of traffic, and the specific solutions that were proposed. The problem prompted the reorganisation of central government, but it also triggered a broad range of national and local discussions concerning the future of towns and cities and the very nature of urban life. In the face of the challenge of traffic, politicians, planners, journalists and the wider public were required to confront the question of how towns and cities could be governed and remodelled in order to accommodate the car, and in doing so



they were forced to consider the meaning of the urban environment, and to ask whether it was possible for it to endure in any recognisable form. Through the 1960s and into the 1970s, ideas as to what constituted a 'good environment' and how such an environment could be secured were formed in urban Britain in response to the challenge of the motor car, and subjected to intense debates involving experts, policymakers and members of the general public. By exploring those debates, it is possible to trace the conceptualisation of the 'environment' as a field of public policy, and gain a fuller understanding of how and why environmental problems achieved a level of political prominence by the early 1970s.

In order to explore this subject, this chapter focuses on the challenge of traffic as it was confronted in Greater London. As the capital city with a population in the 1960s of around eight million, London faced a particularly acute traffic problem, and became the subject of a high-profile attempt to achieve a comprehensive solution. In 1963, the Greater London Council (GLC) was formed through the London Government Act, and was required to produce a development plan for the future of the Greater London area. The Greater London Development Plan (GLDP), eventually submitted to central government in August 1969, featured at its heart a plan for the major redevelopment of the road network, with the proposal of constructing four concentric rings of motorways around the city. While all four proposed motorways were controversial, the most controversial of all was Ringway 1 (also known as the 'Motorway Box'), which would encircle the city close to the edge of the centre, and pass through many of its inner suburbs, including the affluent areas of Hampstead and Blackheath. Owing to large-scale opposition, the government was compelled to hold a public inquiry, chaired by the planning lawyer Frank Layfield, which at the time became the largest statutory inquiry ever to be held

in Britain. Over 28,000 objections were made, and the inquiry sat for 237 days between 7 July 1970 and 9 May 1972.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of this wider thesis, the conflict around the GLDP underlines the importance of the urban traffic problem to the development of environmental politics in Britain. It is not possible to understand the process by focussing only upon either the rural or the urban. As chapters two and four of this thesis show with reference to National Parks and the preservation of the countryside, rural problems were crucial, but, as chapter three shows with reference to clean air, and chapter five and the present chapter show with reference to traffic in towns, they combined with urban challenges to shape the emergence of the 'environment' as a unified field of policy by the early 1970s.

In the specific case of the GLDP, John Davis provides a valuable insight by identifying that the debate over the London motorways had its roots in two features of affluence, namely car ownership and owner-occupation of housing, and this chapter builds upon this by demonstrating how affluence gave rise to a conflict over the character of the urban environment, and shaped governance at both the local and national levels.<sup>2</sup> As is shown throughout this thesis, planning was the mechanism through which policymakers sought solutions to environmental challenges, and both sides in the GLDP conflict invoked the improvement of the environment as their primary aim. Simon Gunn rightly notes that the influential town planner Colin Buchanan shaped environmental discourse by combining conservation with modernism, and it is worth emphasising which side he found himself on in the

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Environment (DOE), *Greater London Development Plan: Report of the Panel of Inquiry. Volume 1: Report* (London, 1973), p. 3

<sup>2</sup> John Davis, "Simple solutions to complex problems": the Greater London Council and the Greater London Development Plan, 1965-1973', in Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford, 2003) pp. 256-59

GLDP debate.<sup>3</sup> The GLC's proposal to profoundly remodel the capital was inspired and supported by Buchanan, highlighting how environmental policy did not simply tend towards preservation during the period explored by this thesis. Policymakers were willing to dramatically reshape entire cities in the name of creating a 'good environment', and employed the expert technical knowledge of specialists such as Buchanan in order to advance their environmental vision.

As in the cases explored in earlier chapters, both sides in the GLDP debate made the argument that it was possible to reconcile progress with conservation, and by doing so create an environment that was worthy of a modern, technological nation. Once again, the centrality of affluence and modernity to the development of environmental politics becomes clear. Even the objectors, who argued that the quality of life in London, in terms of pollution, the division of communities and the erosion of peace and quiet, was being destroyed by motor traffic, accepted that the car had to have a place in the fabric of the city. Quality of life meant the provision of green spaces and quiet residential streets, but in a modern, affluent society, even those that invoked the declining standard of the environment and argued against the motorways acknowledged that it also had to include the freedom to use a car. The objectors at the GLDP inquiry did not on the whole express 'anti-industrial' sentiments, and they rarely showed signs of the environmental radicalism so often associated with the late 1960s and early 1970s. The case of the GLDP provides evidence of how environmental politics in Britain was shaped not by a Romantic reaction against modernity, but by attempts to meet challenges of governance within the context of rising affluence and on going economic and technological development.

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Gunn, 'The Buchanan Report, environment and the problem of traffic in 1960s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 22, no. 4 (2011), p. 529

Before moving on to the specific case study of the GLDP, this chapter looks briefly at the history of motorways in Britain and some of the issues they highlighted during the immediate post-war years. It then examines the work of Buchanan, particularly his 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*. Where the previous chapter explored Buchanan's influence on central government and the planning machinery, this chapter provides a closer examination of his diagnosis and precisely what he prescribed as the potential solution, demonstrating how 'the environment' was conceptualised in relation to the urban traffic problem. This leads into the question of what happened in London, where Buchanan's ideas proved highly influential. The rationale behind the GLDP road proposals is explored, followed by the arguments made by those who opposed the Plan. At the heart of the GLDP inquiry was a contested understanding of 'the environment', with both supporters of and objectors to the motorways invoking environmental impact as the primary justification for their case. The chapter highlights the fluidity of the concept of the 'environment' in the 1960s and early 1970s, and underlines the centrality of ideas of 'quality of life', particularly in an urban setting, in shaping the development of environmental politics in Britain. The chapter ends by examining the findings of the Layfield Inquiry, and the eventual scrapping of the Ringways idea.

There are rich archival materials through which to explore the challenge of urban traffic, particularly in relation to London. This chapter draws extensively upon the papers of the GLDP inquiry, held in the archives of the GLC at the London Metropolitan Archives. It also makes use of the papers of the Blackheath Motorway Action Group and its chairman, the MP for Lewisham North Roland Moyle, which are held at the Local History and Archives Centre in Lewisham. This chapter also refers to printed studies and reports, and the London press.

## Motorways in post-war Britain

In the construction of dedicated highways for motor traffic, Britain was a relatively slow starter. At the end of the Second World War, fifty years after cars had first been legally allowed on to the roads, the country still had no routes specifically constructed and set aside for their use.<sup>4</sup> During the inter-war years, advocates of motoring had placed pressure on the government to build motorways, with significant inspiration taken from the famous *Autobahnen* of Nazi Germany, but it was not until after the war that significant steps were taken towards the construction of new inter-city roads.<sup>5</sup> In May 1946, the Ministry of Transport announced a ten-year plan for Britain's roads, and while this stalled amid the austerity of the late 1940s, there was a change in attitude under the Conservatives in the early 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Rising car ownership ensured that there was growing demand, backed up by industry lobbying in the form of the British Road Federation's Roads Crusade, and in 1955 the government announced an Expanded Road Programme that included a London to Yorkshire motorway (the eventual M1) and a by-pass around the Lancashire town of Preston (which would eventually form part of the M6).<sup>7</sup> By the end of the 1950s, over 400 miles of motorway were under construction in Britain, and the extension of the policy in the 1960s would make it the largest road-building programme in British history.<sup>8</sup>

The response to the opening of the first motorways speaks to the status of the car as a symbol of post-war affluence and modernity. As Peter Merriman notes, motorways were presented as a sign of a new era of progress and prosperity – a novel innovation

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<sup>4</sup> George Charlesworth, *A History of British Motorways* (London, 1984), pp. 28-29

<sup>5</sup> Peter Merriman, *Driving Spaces: A Cultural-Historical Geography of England's M1 Motorway* (Oxford, 2007), p. 35

<sup>6</sup> Charlesworth, *British Motorways*, pp. 23, 34

<sup>7</sup> David Starkie, *The Motorway Age: Road and Traffic Policies in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 1982), pp.4-5; Merriman, *Driving Spaces*, p. 66

<sup>8</sup> Charlesworth, *British Motorways*, pp. 37, 71

worthy of excitement and celebration.<sup>9</sup> Motorists queued to use them on their opening days, and leading political figures hailed them as indications of Britain's post-war ambition. Speaking at the opening of the Preston by-pass on 5 December 1958, the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said that the country would look upon the road as 'a token of what is to follow', while at the opening of the first stretch of the M1 on 2 November 1959, the Minister of Transport Ernest Marples described the event as 'in keeping with the bold, exciting and scientific age in which we live'.<sup>10</sup> Merriman characterises the M1, the first truly extensive stretch of motorway, as having been an exotic space in the late 1950s, ripe for exploration by intrepid travellers. More than 3,000 vehicles used the road in its first hour, and during its opening week the *Observer* dispatched the Formula One driver Tony Brooks on a test drive. 'This broad six-lane through-way,' Brooks wrote, 'divorced from towns and villages, kills the image of a tight little island full of hamlets and lanes and pubs. More than anything ... it is of the twentieth century.' For Merriman, Brooks's words highlight how the arrival of the motorways brought 'an international-metropolitan modernity into the English countryside'.<sup>11</sup>

Amid the excitement, opposition to the first motorways was muted. Preservationist organisations, such as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), were willing to support the roads provided that action was taken to design them in 'harmony' with the landscape, and a host of preservationists, including Clough Williams-Ellis, served on the Ministry of Transport's Landscape Advisory Committee.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, instances of opposition did occur. Objections to the line of the M1 were lodged by 142 parties in 1955, and overruled by the government

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Merriman, 'A Power for Good or Evil': geographies of the M1 in late fifties Britain', in David Gilbert, David Matless and Brian Short (eds.), *Geographies of British Modernity* (Oxford, 2003), p. 121

<sup>10</sup> Merriman, 'Power for Good or Evil', p. 124

<sup>11</sup> Merriman, *Driving Spaces*, pp. 21, 163-64, 171-72

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61-61, 80-81

without the holding of a public inquiry. In 1958, the proposed route of the M1 through Charnwood Forest in Leicestershire prompted opposition from organisations that included the CPRE, the Ramblers' Association and the Nature Conservancy, resulting in a compromise over the final route.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in the early 1960s various groups opposed sections of the route of the M4 from London to Bristol. However, while these instances of protest do show that there was opposition to the motorways, it is important to note that they were always connected to specific questions about the routes of the roads. As Derek Wall writes, 'campaigns that rejected the very principle of motorways, let alone the cult of the car, were at the time virtually unknown'.<sup>14</sup> As the construction of national motorways continued at pace in the 1960s, it would be in relation to towns and cities that the consequences of mass car ownership and the impact of major road building would become the subjects of significant contestation and debate.

### **The Buchanan Report and the challenge of traffic in towns**

In order to understand the challenge posed to Britain's towns and cities by motor traffic, it is worth examining the rate at which the number of vehicles on the roads grew during the twentieth century. In 1914 there were only 388,860 vehicles in Britain, yet by the outbreak of the Second World War there were 3.1 million. By 1956 there were 6.7 million, with many more expected to appear in the coming years and decades.<sup>15</sup> The predictions of the 1950s were not wrong – by 1965 there were 11.6

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-71

<sup>14</sup> Derek Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (London, 1999), p. 24

<sup>15</sup> Colin Buchanan, *Mixed Blessing: The Motor in Britain* (London, 1958), pp. 9, 22

million vehicles on the roads, and by 1975 there were 16.5 million.<sup>16</sup> By 2013, the figure had more than doubled to 35 million.<sup>17</sup>

It was this rate of growth that prompted Colin Buchanan to issue a warning in 1958. As his book's title, *Mixed Blessing*, made clear, Buchanan's approach was characterised by a fundamental ambivalence towards the coming of the motor age. He began his book by emphasising the profound impact of the motor car, describing its arrival in Britain in the late nineteenth century as a 'divide in time', a 'point at which something happened which was destined to change everything over a wide sector of our affairs'. While it would not have been recognised at the time, the arrival of the first car in 1888 'marked the point at which many of our social and economic arrangements were diverted, gently at first, onto a new course', and the motor vehicle would 'come to affect the lives of every single person', and present 'a tougher series of adjustment problems than perhaps any single invention has done in the course of history'.<sup>18</sup>

Although he described the car as 'a Trojan Horse more brutally destructive in some of its consequences than any that emerged from the original wooden horse', Buchanan's perspective was not purely a negative one. The motor vehicle had greatly increased people's personal mobility, and opened up new opportunities for work and leisure to the general population that could not have been dreamed of a century earlier. Moreover, it had become an integral part of everyday life – for better, or worse, vehicles were 'a vital link in our economic system', and society's dependence on them was unlikely to be reversed.<sup>19</sup> Yet for all the opportunities and everyday services that they provided, motor vehicles were also instruments of destruction.

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<sup>16</sup> Colin G. Pooley, Jean Turnbull and Mags Adams, *A Mobile Century? Changes in Everyday Mobility in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 21

<sup>17</sup> Department for Transport, 'Vehicle Licensing Statistics: 2013', <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vehicle-licensing-statistics-2013> (accessed 30 October 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Buchanan, *Mixed Blessing*, p. 1

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 1, 22, 59



Traffic had become a 'destructive lava welling out from the towns', bringing with it 'death and injury, pain and bereavement, noise and smell, and ... vast winding trails of serious damage to urban and country amenities'. In Buchanan's view, only war was a more destructive force, yet at the same time the motor vehicle was 'inextricably inserted into all our affairs, a major part of our national livelihood, and to many people (including the author), little short of an object of worship'.<sup>20</sup>

In his article on the urban traffic debate, Simon Gunn argues that Buchanan developed an approach that was simultaneously modernist and conservationist, through which he proposed the comprehensive remodelling of towns in order to conserve a more traditional form of urban living.<sup>21</sup> That is correct, but it is worth saying more about just what Buchanan asked his readers to consider in relation to the impact of the motor car. In Buchanan's writing, what loomed large was not simply a question of modernisation or conservation, or something in between, but rather a question that interrogated the meaning and purpose of urban life, and asked whether such a thing could even endure in the face of mass car ownership. In *Mixed Blessing*, he described traffic as 'a wholesale destroyer of much that we have prized as part of civilised living', and argued that in confronting the problem it was not only the movement of traffic that was at stake, but the very survival of 'civilised town life'.<sup>22</sup>

The question of the future of 'civilised' urban life was at the centre of *Traffic in Towns*, Buchanan's 1963 report for the Ministry of Transport. Arising 'directly out of man's own ingenuity and growing affluence', the motor car presented 'nothing less ... than a threat to the whole familiar physical form of towns'. Buchanan accepted that the car was a 'highly beneficial invention', and that its widespread use was certain to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 99

<sup>21</sup> Gunn, 'Buchanan Report', p. 529

<sup>22</sup> Buchanan, *Mixed Blessing*, pp. 99, 210

continue, but argued that its integration into urban life was ‘coming into perspective as the supreme social problem of the future’.<sup>23</sup> The question was whether it would be possible to accommodate traffic while also creating ‘towns which are worth living in’.<sup>24</sup> A similar case was made in the report of Sir Geoffrey Crowther’s Steering Group, which was published alongside Buchanan’s work. Crowther presented the problem in terms of achieving a balance between the public’s desire for personal mobility and the desire for satisfactory urban surroundings. The car was ‘an instrument of emancipation, a symbol of the modern age’, and almost all families wished to acquire one, but it was also ‘a menace that can spoil our civilisation’. Unless action was taken, ‘all chance of urbane living’ would be defeated.<sup>25</sup>

Having diagnosed the problem, Buchanan turned to offering a prescription for what could be done. In his view, radical action was required. It was certainly not an option to do nothing – if the situation was not addressed, ‘either the utility of vehicles in towns will decline rapidly, or the pleasantness and safety of surroundings will deteriorate catastrophically’. Buchanan may have been keen to conserve urban life, but there was nothing conservative about the methods he proposed – the aim, he argued, should be ‘to remould our environment to our liking’.<sup>26</sup> In *Traffic in Towns*, he outlined a scheme for fundamentally redesigning urban areas in order to separate traffic from centres of population. In doing so he drew a clear link between congestion and quality of life, using the term ‘good environment’ to describe ‘a place, or an area, or even a street, which is free from the adverse effects of traffic’. A ‘good’ urban environment could not be one that received large volumes of traffic or suffered from congestion. Buchanan advanced the concept of ‘environmental areas’,

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<sup>23</sup> Colin Buchanan, *Traffic in Towns: The Specially Shortened Version of the Buchanan Report* (Harmondsworth, 1964), pp. 17-18

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 15

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 43

or ‘urban rooms’ to describe sections in which residential and commercial life would take place free from the nuisance of free traffic. Instead of passing through such areas, vehicles would be ‘canalised’ along ‘urban corridors’, i.e. primary roads designed specifically for moving large volumes of traffic.<sup>27</sup> In order to achieve this, comprehensive redevelopment would be required, but in proposing it Buchanan challenged decision-makers and planners to be bold. He asked them to imagine what a ‘good environment’ and ‘civilised’ urban life should be like, and urged them to take action to make that environment a reality. While the traffic problem had the potential ‘to ruin this island by the end of the century’, an ambitious commitment to ‘recreating the urban environment in a vigorous and lively way could do more than anything to make it the most exciting country in the world, with incalculable results for our welfare and prosperity’.<sup>28</sup>

As was noted in the previous chapter, Buchanan’s report captured national attention. It succeeded in encouraging greater integration of transport and planning policy within central government, but it also inspired practical attempts to implement its ideas. Buchanan had called for bold decisions to be made on the future of Britain’s towns and cities, and his message was heard within the GLC, where a scheme was developed to remodel London around the principles put forward in *Traffic in Towns*.

### **The Greater London Development Plan**

In 1963, the London Government Act created the GLC, a new strategic authority sitting above the 32 boroughs of inner and outer London. The 1963 Act charged the GLC with producing a development plan for Greater London, a requirement that reflected a shift in thinking in town and country planning that had taken place during

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-59

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 248

the early 1960s. As discussed in the previous chapter, the problem of traffic in towns had led to calls for greater integration of land-use and transport planning. Under the Labour government from 1964 there was a shift towards encouraging regional rather than localised planning, and in 1965 the Ministry of Housing and Local Government's report *The Future of Development Plans* introduced the notion of 'structure planning', through which plans would focus on 'the broad pattern of future development and redevelopment and [deal] with land use/transport relationships in an integrated way'.<sup>29</sup> In dealing with housing, transport, population, employment, utilities and recreation for the entire Greater London conurbation, the GLDP would be the largest structure plan to be produced during this period.

While the GLDP was broad in scope, the severity of the traffic challenge and the extent of the redevelopment that would potentially be required ensured that the transport proposals came to dominate discussion of the Plan. Above all, attention focused on the proposal to construct the four concentric motorways, or Ringways, around the city. In advocating the Ringways, the GLDP built upon the town planner Patrick Abercrombie's famous Greater London Plan of 1944. Abercrombie had proposed four rings moving outwards from the centre, and the idea of three rings had formed a part of the GLC's predecessor, the London County Council's plans since 1945.<sup>30</sup> Although the GLDP was not presented to central government until 1969, it was public knowledge from the mid-1960s that the Plan would include urban motorways. In March 1965 *New Society* and the *Evening Standard* revealed a map of the '£450m plan [that] will change [the] face of London', with the main element being 'a box-shaped ring motorway ... running about four miles from the edge of central

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<sup>29</sup> Davis, 'Simple solutions', p. 251

<sup>30</sup> Charlesworth, *British Motorways*, p. 196

London'. The Plan, wrote the *Evening Standard*, was 'certain to have a profound influence on the future geography of London'.<sup>31</sup>

Before turning to the arguments deployed by those who opposed the Ringways plan, it is necessary to examine the case that was made by the GLC in favour of the motorways. The Council wished to drive four eight-lane highways through many of the capital's inner and outer suburbs, a process that would require years of construction and the demolition of up to 30,000 homes, but it proposed to do it in the interests of *improving* London's environment. What is striking about the debate over the GLDP is the manner in which the traffic challenge was conceptualised as 'environmental', and the extent to which a 'good environment' became the principle to which both sides appealed. For the GLC, the construction of motorways through densely populated areas of the capital was an *environmental* solution to an *environmental* problem, which would lead to improved standards of living for Londoners.

The starting point of the GLC's case was that the present circumstances had become intolerable. 'The very vitality of London,' the GLC argued, 'has become self-strangulating.'<sup>32</sup> Traffic congestion was presented as the greatest challenge facing the city, and the GLC outlined 'six evils' with which it was associated, from visual, aural and atmospheric pollution, to road accidents, wasted time and the halting of bus services.<sup>33</sup> Congestion 'stultifies and limits life', and as London choked from the effects of traffic, there was a question as to how much longer the city's inhabitants would be able to cope.<sup>34</sup> Inaction was not an option – something had to be done, as the problem would only continue to grow more severe. It was noted that in 1966

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<sup>31</sup> *Evening Standard*, 25 March 1965

<sup>32</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, City of London (LMA): GLC/TD/GLDP/08/244 Background Papers (1966-72), Greater London Development Plan: Preliminary Report, October 1966, p. 7

<sup>33</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/055 Transcripts of Proceedings (1971-72), 53rd Day, 26 January 1971, p. 10

<sup>34</sup> Greater London Council (GLC), *Tomorrow's London: A Background to the Greater London Development Plan* (London, 1969), p. 62

there were 17 cars for every 100 Londoners, and that by 1981 there would be 29 per 100.<sup>35</sup> Sooner or later, argued the GLC's counsel Peter Boydell at the public inquiry, a large majority of families in London would own a car, and that was a situation that had to be planned for.<sup>36</sup> If London was to remain an attractive place to live and work, the demand for movement had to be met, and any proposals to address the problem within the framework of the existing road network could 'at best be considered as palliatives'.<sup>37</sup>

The importance of mobility was central to the GLC's argument. Movement, the Council pointed out, was an essential component of city life, not simply as an end in itself but as 'an integral part of human activity serving both social and economic development'. In the post-war period, mobility had become more and more crucial. A 'general revolution of expectations' had taken place, and higher living standards had 'widened the horizons for the vast majority'. In order to meet their raised expectations, people expected good standards of personal mobility and, while public transport had an important role to play, the GLC argued that the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of car ownership was vital. The car was no longer just a status symbol, but 'an important and widely available asset providing accessibility to many places that were previously beyond the reach of the average family'.<sup>38</sup> As such, the GLC had a responsibility to ensure that the GLDP secured this newly acquired accessibility. In doing so, the Plan opened up the question of the place of individual liberty in urban life. The freedom to move around the city was crucial, yet that freedom was causing environmental deterioration and ultimately limiting movement

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<sup>35</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/008 Transcripts of Proceedings, 6th Day, 6 October 1970, p. 25

<sup>36</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/104 Transcripts of Proceedings, 102nd Day, 7 May 1971, p. 14

<sup>37</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/055 Transcripts of Proceedings, 53rd Day, 26 January 1971, p. 13

<sup>38</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/529 Proofs of Evidence (1970-71), GLC Subject Evidence, Stage 1: Transport, Proof E12/1, November 1970, pp. 19, 21; LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/247 Background Papers, Greater London Development Plan Draft Studies, October 1967, p. 8

through congestion. At the public inquiry the GLC's Director for Planning and Transportation, Bernard Collins, argued that a balance had to be struck – there could not be 'unbridled licence' to use motor vehicles, as the consequences were too severe, but nor could there be 'intolerable repression' of the right to move freely about the city.<sup>39</sup>

For the British Roads Federation (BRF), the industry lobbying organisation that threw its weight firmly behind the Ringways plan, the issue of freedom was even more critical. In its evidence to the inquiry, the BRF argued that car ownership had become a fact of life, and that it was impossible to put the clock back. Car use would continue to grow, and 'any too great restriction is trying to copy Canute'.<sup>40</sup> Now that it was a fact of life, the car was integral to personal freedom. 'If a Londoner wants to get his own car,' the BRF's counsel argued at the inquiry,

if he wants to save up for it, if he takes pride and joy in its use, why should he not have the same opportunities as everybody else up and down the big cities of England? ... Why should he have a lower share of the mobility which is now an essential feature of life?<sup>41</sup>

The BRF even went so far as to argue that the freedom to use a car formed part of a 'good environment'. The environment did not only constitute 'the flowers and the trees' or 'the birds and the bees', but also access to the essential services of city life, including 'accessibility and mobility'. This formed part of the 'total environment', and instead of being treated as 'lepers or criminals', drivers were entitled to a 'reasonable

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<sup>39</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/010 Transcripts of Proceedings, 8th Day, 8 Oct 1970, p. 5

<sup>40</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/095 Transcripts of Proceedings, 93rd Day, 26 April 1971, pp. 10-11

<sup>41</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/099 Transcripts of Proceedings, 97th Day, 30 April 1971, p. 45

degree of pleasure and use out of owning their car as part of the environment of their lives'.<sup>42</sup>

The BRF's characterisation of car use as part of the 'environment' underlines the flexibility with which the term was used at the time. The 'environment' could mean almost anything, but invariably its use had some connection to the question of 'quality of life'. Having established that congestion was making life in London increasingly intolerable, and that the future of the city had to include provision for private car use, the GLC built its case for the construction of the Ringways around the argument that they would bring significant environmental improvements to the capital. At the inquiry, the Council argued that its 'chief concern' was 'with the quality of the environment of the Londoner'. By 'environment', it was clear that the GLC was referring to the surroundings of urban life in their entirety – 'the great single objective of this Plan', argued Boydell, 'is to secure an improved total environment, and that environment in the Council's view has many components'. In order to improve the 'total environment', it would be necessary not only to secure standards of housing, recreational opportunities and 'the state of the general physical surroundings', but also 'the freedom to move from A to B with relative ease, and in some degree of comfort'.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, it was a matter of securing the quality of life. 'London's citizens,' the GLC argued, 'demand and deserve an environment that is compatible with modern concepts of dignity and enjoyable living.' As the urban environment was largely man-made, it was clear that the responsibility lay with Londoners to shape it for the future. Whereas in the nineteenth century the challenge for government had been to tackle basic problems of housing and sanitation, in the second half of the twentieth

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<sup>42</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/095 Transcripts of Proceedings, 93rd Day, 26 April 1971, pp. 10-11

<sup>43</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/008 Transcripts of Proceedings, 6th Day, 6 Oct 1970, pp. 16, 25



century the aims were further reaching. The GLDP would not only deal with the ‘crying scandals of our age, like slums and road deaths, but also with that stunting of the human spirit which results from indifference to some of man’s less obvious needs’. ‘Beauty and tranquillity,’ the Council concluded, ‘must come with safety and cleanliness’.<sup>44</sup>

In promising to ‘provide a total new environment for those who live here, those who work, and those who just want to enjoy themselves’, the GLC sought to place its project in the context of the wider concern around environmental issues.<sup>45</sup> To mark European Conservation Year in 1970, the Council published a pamphlet extolling the environmental virtues of the GLDP. Having established that amid ‘the growing international recognition of environmental reality man can no longer shrug off his responsibility for conservation and environment’, the pamphlet explained that the GLC was committed to making a serious contribution ‘towards a better life and future for all London and Londoners’. This would be done through implementing the GLDP, which was characterised by its concern with the environment – the aim was ‘the conservation of the best coupled with the renewal or improvement of what is run-down or inferior’. This would not simply involve preserving the famous landmarks and attractions of the capital, but rather ‘conserving and improving the environment of the individual family at home, at work, at play, at school and when shopping’.<sup>46</sup>

How, then, did the GLC argue that the GLDP, and specifically the Ringways, would improve the ‘total environment’ of London? In line with Buchanan’s arguments in *Traffic in Towns*, the GLC stated that the segregation of people from traffic was the

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<sup>44</sup> GLC, *Tomorrow’s London*, pp. 7, 9-10

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79

<sup>46</sup> GLC, *The Greater London Council in the Environment* (London, 1970), p. 3

essential environmental component of the Plan.<sup>47</sup> The four concentric motorways would comprise a 'primary road network' that would provide the 'canalisation' advocated by Buchanan. According to the Council, the primary network would carry half of the city's main traffic, removing it from populated residential and commercial areas.<sup>48</sup> With the Ringways carrying that traffic, and an improved 'secondary road network' reducing traffic volumes further, populated areas could be designated as the 'environmental areas' or 'urban rooms' proposed by Buchanan, free from congestion and all its associated problems, including the noise and fumes that blighted the lives of those living in areas subjected to heavy through traffic.<sup>49</sup> The new road network would form 'an integral part of an improved environment', freeing London from 'a large part of the main nuisance traffic'.<sup>50</sup>

As Gunn points out, Buchanan's work did much to alert both government and the public to the environmental challenges posed by cars. Yet if we are to see Buchanan as a key figure in the growth of environmental awareness in the 1960s and 1970s, as Gunn does, it is important to note that his conception of an improved urban environment was very much in line with the thinking of the GLC.<sup>51</sup> The Council used Buchanan as a consultant as the GLDP progressed through the inquiry process, and the proposal to construct the motorways met with his firm approval. In a study of the potential impact of the Plan on north east London, Buchanan and his team concluded that the Ringways 'seemed to offer the only practicable means of reconciling the pressures for greater mobility with the demand for a better environment'. The motorways, Buchanan argued, were 'an indispensable element of

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<sup>47</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/055 Transcripts of Proceedings, 53rd Day, 26 January 1971, p. 24

<sup>48</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/529 Proofs of Evidence, GLC Subject Evidence, Stage 1: Transport, Proof E12/1, November 1970, p. 174

<sup>49</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/248 Background Papers, Greater London Development Plan: Draft Text of Written Statement, March 1969, p. 4

<sup>50</sup> GLC, *Tomorrow's London*, p. 69

<sup>51</sup> Gunn, 'Buchanan Report', pp. 541-42

the strategy’ and would ‘make a salient contribution to the environmental success of the Plan’.<sup>52</sup> In his evidence to the inquiry, Buchanan argued that the failure over the course of eight decades to provide London with an adequate road system had produced ‘devastating environmental results’, and stated that he ‘saw no reason to doubt the basic soundness’ of the GLC’s road-building policy. In his view, the Ringways proposal was ‘fairly modest’, and could ‘in no way be regarded as a “sell out” to the private car’.<sup>53</sup>

For the GLC, that notion formed a central part of the argument for the motorways. The Council firmly rejected the idea that the Plan was a ‘sell out’ to the car, with Boydell telling the inquiry that it was a ‘myth’ that it was ‘unduly weighted in favour of the private motorist’.<sup>54</sup> To the contrary, the GLC argued that the GLDP was a balanced proposal that offered an answer to a problem that had to be addressed. There was no ‘alternative solution which is both feasible and effective’, and it was a delusion to think that by not building the Ringways ‘the character of London will be maintained’ and ‘all will be sweetness and light’.<sup>55</sup> London did not have to face a choice between the two extremes of ‘[destroying] itself by congestion and chaos’, or allowing ‘planners to destroy it by carving it up into islands of habitations cowering under the roaring motorways’. The GLDP was a compromise that would provide the city with a new road network and an improved environment. The Council acknowledged that some of those whose homes and businesses lay in the path of the proposed motorways would suffer, but cited the ‘Benthamite principle’ to argue that

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<sup>52</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/447 Background Papers, Greenwich and Blackheath Study, April 1971, pp. 1-2

<sup>53</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/529 Proofs of Evidence, GLC Subject Evidence, Stage 1: Transport, Inquiry Proof E12/3, Evidence of Professor C.D. Buchanan, 1971, p. 3

<sup>54</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/063 Transcripts of Proceedings, 61st Day, 3 March 1971, p. 10

<sup>55</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/238 Transcripts of Proceedings, 236th Day, 8 May 1972, p. 68; LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/104 Transcripts of Proceedings, 102nd Day, 7 May 1971, p. 28

the majority of Londoners would benefit.<sup>56</sup> Yes, there would be upheaval, but London was not a 'museum piece', and the disruption had to be weighed against the general improvement of the environment.<sup>57</sup>

The GLDP, then, was presented by the GLC as the only practical solution to a critical environmental problem. By building the new road network, the Council argued that an unsatisfactory and deteriorating environment could be revolutionised, and that the quality of life of the majority of London's inhabitants could be secured and improved. Unsurprisingly, that was not a perspective that met with universal approval, and it is now necessary to examine the arguments of those that opposed the Plan.

### **The case against the Greater London Development Plan**

As has been noted, the public inquiry into the GLDP was, at the time, the largest statutory inquiry to have been held in Britain. With over 28,000 objections submitted, the majority of which related to the transport proposals of the Plan, there is no doubting that, for all the GLC's promotion of their supposed benefits, the Ringways were the subject of significant opposition. Indeed, while it would take until 1970 for the arguments to be heard before an inquiry, public opposition to motorways in London dated back to the earliest stages of the proposals. In Blackheath in south-east London, a local campaign group, the Dover Radial Route Committee, was formed in 1962 to oppose a radial motorway that would eventually form part of the Ringways plan.<sup>58</sup> When the Ringways themselves were announced in 1965, and it became clear that the proposed Ringway 1 would pass straight through

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<sup>56</sup> GLC, *Tomorrow's London*, pp. 64, 129

<sup>57</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/529 Proofs of Evidence, GLC Subject Evidence, Stage 1: Transport, Proof E12/1, November 1970, p. 174

<sup>58</sup> Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre (LEW): S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1 Roland Moyle MP Papers, Ringway 1 (1962-1970), Dover Radial Route Committee Press Release, September 1962

Blackheath, the members of the Dover Radial Route Committee stepped up their campaign, and quickly found that they had allies in other areas of London threatened by the proposals. In particular, links were formed with the Hampstead Motorway Action Group, and the Committee was eventually renamed the Blackheath Motorway Action Group (BMAG) to underline the connection with its north London counterpart.<sup>59</sup>

In 1968 a citywide London Motorway Action Group (LMAG) was formed, chaired by the Labour MP for Battersea North, Douglas Jay, in order to bring together the local campaign groups distributed around the routes of the Ringways.<sup>60</sup> When the Layfield Inquiry opened in July 1970, the LMAG, together with an array of local groups, played a leading role in presenting the case against the GLDP. Those campaign groups were joined by a number of London boroughs affected by the motorway proposals, including Greenwich, Croydon, Hounslow and Camden, and by national organisations such as the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Commons, Footpaths and Open Spaces Preservation Society. The inquiry also received a large volume of submissions from individual objectors.

Between the GLC and the opponents of the GLDP there was one area of clear agreement – motor traffic posed a major threat to the urban environment, and a solution had to be found. The Blackheath campaigners acknowledged this as early as 1964, when they referred to a report by the Ministry of Transport that noted that, while the prospect of universal car ownership held ‘the promise of greater opportunity for personal convenience in travel and enjoyment’, it also posed a ‘menace [to] the preservation of the traditional beauties and amenities of our cities’.

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<sup>59</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Letter from Roland Moyle to David Smith, 12 July 1966

<sup>60</sup> LEW: A 74/7 Blackheath Motorway Action Group Papers (1968-73), Minutes of a Meeting of the Dover Radial Route Committee, 11 April 1968

While there was ‘no ready panacea’, the report argued that ‘the right and equitable solution is a prize worth striving for’.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, campaigners from the Chiswick Motorways Liaison Committee recognised that the ‘conflict between the demands for increased mobility and preservation and enhancement of the environment is one of the major problems facing London’, and acknowledged that some form of action had to be taken.<sup>62</sup> Whatever the solution, it would need to involve the accommodation of the car – the ‘rise in affluence and the increasing desire for mobility’ were not processes that could be halted, and the Chiswick group were well aware that ‘in London there is a continual process of change’.<sup>63</sup>

Both the GLC and the objectors agreed that traffic posed a severe problem for London, and both accepted that cars would need to form a part of any future plan for the city. Where they disagreed was on the degree to which private vehicles should be accommodated, and on whether a network of urban motorways offered a viable solution to the problem. The objectors, like the GLC, took as their starting point the need to produce a satisfactory urban environment for the capital. Indeed, in opposing the GLDP, objectors were happy to compliment the environmental objectives of the Council. At the inquiry, the LMAG pointed out that they were largely in agreement with the GLC when it came to the aims of the Plan. To the Council’s ‘overall aim to improve the environment’, the LMAG could have no objections.<sup>64</sup> The problem was that this resulted in a ‘paradox’ – while the LMAG agreed ‘with much of the GLC’s current approach and their professed principles’, the group objected to the actual proposals. Far from bringing about an improvement,

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<sup>61</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Dover Radial Route Campaign, Memorandum on the London County Council’s Proposals for the Dover Radial Route through Blackheath and District, undated

<sup>62</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/093 Transcripts of Proceedings, 91st Day, 22 April 1971, p. 2

<sup>63</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/532 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/28, Chiswick Motorway Liaison Committee, February 1971, p. 7

<sup>64</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/079 Transcripts of Proceedings, 77th Day, 29 March 1971, p. 8

the implementation of the GLDP would in fact ‘greatly damage the environment’.<sup>65</sup>

A similar view was expressed by RIBA, which told the inquiry that it was ‘pleased to see comments coming from the GLC which indicate a growing awareness of their concern for the environment’, but expressed regret that the Council had put more thought into traffic and roads than it had into how to improve the environment.<sup>66</sup>

Time and again, objectors pointed out that the Ringways proposal did not meet the GLC’s environmental objectives. The Chiswick Motorway Liaison Committee noted that the Council recognised ‘the importance of the environmental aspects’, but at the same time paid ‘too little regard to them’ in the actual development plan proposals.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, objectors in Blackheath argued that the construction of motorways was ‘completely inconsistent with every declared aim in the Plan in regard to the environment’.<sup>68</sup>

If the GLC argued that the Ringways would enhance London’s environment, why did its opponents believe that the roads would fail to fulfil this aim? At the inquiry, the various objectors put forward a number of practical reasons for why the motorways would damage life in the city. Most obviously, it was pointed out that those living on the proposed routes of the roads stood to lose their homes. It was estimated that the construction of the motorways would involve the demolition of 15,000 to 20,000 houses and require the rehousing of 45,000 people.<sup>69</sup> During the construction process, those living in the areas through which the Ringways were to pass would experience severe upheaval, with all the disruption that came with major building work, while prior to construction residents would face ‘planning blight’,

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<sup>65</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/531 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/20, London Amenity and Transport Association and London Motorway Action Group, January 1971, p. 190; LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/079 Transcripts of Proceedings, 77th Day, 29 March 1971, pp. 8-9

<sup>66</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/089 Transcripts of Proceedings, 87th Day, 16 April 1971, p. 41

<sup>67</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/093 Transcripts of Proceedings, 91st Day, 22 April 1971, p. 2

<sup>68</sup> LEW: S/5/3/40 A/01/1/1/2 Roland Moyle MP Papers, Ringway 1 (1970-72), Proof of Evidence of the Blackheath Society to Greater London Development Plan Inquiry, 16 August 1971

<sup>69</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Blackheath Motorway Action Group Flyer, undated

whereby property prices stagnated due to the knowledge that the area would eventually be host to an eight-lane motorway. The LMAG estimated that a quarter of a million people would eventually live within 200 yards of Ringway 1, and pointed out that ‘it would be difficult to find many other places in the world where a 30-mile motorway would have such an ill effect on so many people’.<sup>70</sup> Once the Ringways were built, local residents would have to live with the environmental effects of having a major motorway passing through their neighbourhood. The Chiswick Motorways Liaison Committee argued that the ‘problems of noise, dirt and pollution’ would be ‘immense’, while the BMAG stressed that ‘Ringway 1 would subject many thousands of families living on the edge of the motorway to an intolerable burden of noise, fumes, dirt and vibration’.<sup>71</sup>

As an example of the destruction that it was argued the Ringways would bring, objectors pointed to the Westway, an elevated section of the A40 that ran between Paddington and North Kensington in west London. When the Westway was opened in July 1970, the ceremony was disrupted by ‘angry householders who [lived] in the shadow of the two-and-a-half mile motorway’, many of whom now had ‘their bedrooms less than 50 feet away from the road’. The *Evening Standard* reported that the residents faced ‘noise, dirt [and] danger’ as a result of the road, and would go to bed and wake up ‘to the sound of streams of passing vehicles’.<sup>72</sup> At the Layfield Inquiry, it was suggested that the Westway provided a glimpse of the future that would be ushered in by the Ringways. Hounslow Borough Council described the road as ‘the worst environmental blunder that planning has committed since the end

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<sup>70</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/531 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/20, London Amenity and Transport Association and London Motorway Action Group, January 1971, p. 114

<sup>71</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/532 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/28, Chiswick Motorway Liaison Committee, February 1971, p. 19; LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Blackheath Motorway Action Group Flyer, undated

<sup>72</sup> *Evening Standard*, 28 July 1970



of the war', while RIBA noted that the experience of the Westway left them extremely sceptical of the GLC's environmental intentions.<sup>73</sup> This concern was underlined by the Chiswick committee, which argued that the Westway was 'the touchstone by which the reality of the GLC's intentions must be judged', and urged that 'no credence be given to bland assurances or grandiose proposals until the existing areas of misery and squalor caused by motorway construction have been rehabilitated to standards which are acceptable in a civilised community'.<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, much of the opposition case rested on the effects that the Ringways would have on London's communities. A key component of the objections was the issue of severance – the motorways would physically divide the areas through which they passed, with little or no regard for community life. The BMAG argued that Blackheath would 'have the heart of its community torn out', with Ringway 1 passing 'straight through the middle of the village shopping centre'.<sup>75</sup> The problem was well described by one private objector, E.J. Tagg, who appealed to the GLC not to 'ruin [London's] attractions altogether by carving it into rings' and 'cutting people off from each other'.<sup>76</sup> Whereas the GLC argued that the Ringways would enhance the quality of life in London, the objectors contended that the roads would prove devastating to the city's standard of living. At the heart of the debate was the extent to which the motor car could and should be incorporated into the fabric of urban life. In contrast to the BRF's suggestion that a 'good environment' should include the freedom to drive a car, opponents of the Ringways argued that the accommodation of traffic in London had gone far enough. It was not reasonable, the LMAG pointed out, 'to go

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<sup>73</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/074 Transcripts of Proceedings, 72nd Day, 22 March 1971, p. 14; LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/534 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/43, London and South Eastern Regions of the Royal Institute of British Architects, March 1971, p. 3

<sup>74</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/532 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/28, Chiswick Motorway Liaison Committee, February 1971, p. 19

<sup>75</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Statement by Roland Moyle MP, undated

<sup>76</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/09/006 Numbered Objections (1969-72), Objection 522

on indefinitely destroying the ordinary amenities of the city in the interests of mobility'.<sup>77</sup> In the view of the Ealing Residents' Association, 'the worshipping at the shrine of the road vehicle' had become 'an obsession which blinds many planners'.<sup>78</sup> In their desire to accommodate the modern development of private car ownership, the GLC had lost sight of the true purpose of the urban environment – as the BMAG put it, if it succeeded in constructing the Ringways the Council would 'make a desolation and call it progress'.<sup>79</sup>

On top of the noise and fumes, that desolation would come in the form of disruption to the city's social functions. The Blackheath campaigners noted that 'social responsibility and civic pride' were 'valuable ingredients in the making of a good environment', and numerous objectors argued that the urban motorways could not be compatible with the maintenance of cohesive neighbourhoods.<sup>80</sup> RIBA pointed out that what mattered was not only the relieving of traffic congestion, but also 'the way in which people live in cities', while two private objectors, Sira Dermen and Andrew Crook, told the inquiry that any plan for city development had to derive from 'a conception of urban life'. 'We, unlike the GLC,' argued Dermen and Crook, 'shall come right out and declare our belief that any city dedicated to the ideals of civilised life, physical and mental health, and social justice cannot accommodate motorways'. The motorway was not 'an item that can be harmonised with any of the needs of urban life', because it 'dominates both physically and emotionally the whole environment'.<sup>81</sup> Another objector, Jonathan Tyler, expanded that point, arguing that

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<sup>77</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/531 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/20, London Amenity and Transport Association and London Motorway Action Group, January 1971, p. 112-13

<sup>78</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/532 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/24, Ealing Residents' Association, undated

<sup>79</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Urban Motorways: An Answer, undated

<sup>80</sup> LEW: S/5/3/40 A/01/1/1/2, Proof of Evidence of Blackheath Society to Greater London Development Plan Inquiry, 16 August 1971

<sup>81</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/536 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/83, Sira Dermen and Andrew Crook, undated

the car was threatening the human scale of the city. Whereas in the past London's built environment had taken 'a remarkably ordered, sensible and satisfying form', with the motorways the GLDP would introduce into the city structures of 'inhuman proportions'.<sup>82</sup> As G.C. Jenkins put it in a further private objection, 'roads and traffic should exist to serve [and] not dominate the community', but with the Ringways plan the GLC had put 'the apparently insatiable demands of traffic before the interest and well-being of the residents who actually have to live with the results of their planning'.<sup>83</sup>

Once the motorways were built, the objectors noted, the impact on London's environment would be irreversible. In a joint objection, Greenwich and Croydon borough councils told the inquiry that there could 'be few things more immutable than a motorway', and argued that the final decision on the Ringways would be 'the most far reaching of any decision to affect the city of London in its history'.<sup>84</sup> For the Reverend J. Carolin, a private objector, the motorways would bring 'wholesale destruction' on a 'scale unparalleled since Hitler's blitz', devastating longstanding communities that were 'of immense importance in our present disordered society'.<sup>85</sup> Numerous objectors emphasised the legacy that the motorways would leave for future Londoners, with the Grove Park Residents Association telling the inquiry panel that if they approved the Ringways the decision would be 'on your consciences for the rest of your lives'.<sup>86</sup> In the view of the BMAG, the decision was not simply about the character of London in the present, but about the kind of city that its residents handed on to their grandchildren. 'I for one,' argued the group's secretary

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<sup>82</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/535 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/63, Jonathan Tyler, undated

<sup>83</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/530 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/11, GC Jenkins, undated

<sup>84</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/063 Transcripts of Proceedings, 61st Day, 3 March 1971, p. 47

<sup>85</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/535 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/62, Reverend J Carolin, undated

<sup>86</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/149/2 Transcripts of Proceedings, 147th Day, 16 September 1971, p. 58

Ronald Pepper, 'do not want to be remembered as part of the generation that despoiled London in the name of some dubious progress'.<sup>87</sup>

In Blackheath in particular, the Ringways plan ran up against a conception of urban life that was incompatible with the construction of urban motorways. As a London suburb with a distinctive 'village' character, it was argued that Blackheath would be particularly devastated by the arrival of Ringway 1. Indeed, the GLDP appeared to conflict directly with the 1967 Civic Amenities Act, a piece of preservationist legislation that had been brought forward by the former Conservative Minister of Housing and Local Government Duncan Sandys, and passed with the support of the Labour government.<sup>88</sup> The act, which introduced the concept of designating as 'conservation areas' parts of towns that it was 'desirable to preserve or enhance', underlines how conservation and development often ran parallel to one another during this period. As Davis notes, plans such as the GLDP raised the spectre of American cities, with their urban highways and limitless sprawl, and conservationists fought to defend the individual character of London's areas.<sup>89</sup> Blackheath was designated as a conservation area under the Civic Amenities Act, and campaigners made much use of that status in their fight against Ringway 1. Many of the objections relating to Blackheath, a large proportion of which repeated stock text provided by the BMAG, made reference to its status as a conservation area, and throughout the inquiry campaigners emphasised the special character of the area.<sup>90</sup> Objecting to the 'destruction of what little beauty London has left to make way for the motor car', one resident, Audrey Turner, described Blackheath as 'one of the most compact and charming' areas of the city, and argued that 'no mere consideration of convenience

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<sup>87</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/152 Transcripts of Proceedings, 150th Day, 22 September 1971, pp. 5-6

<sup>88</sup> Starkie, *Motorway Age*, p. 82

<sup>89</sup> Davis, 'Simple solutions', p. 260

<sup>90</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/09/001 Numbered Objections, Objection 20

and expediency' could justify its devastation by Ringway 1.<sup>91</sup> In the view of the BMAG, the fact that the GLC was willing to drive an eight-lane motorway through Blackheath demonstrated that the Council had no coherent vision for the urban environment. Whereas many of London's areas revealed 'a marked lack of amenity, an absence of local loyalty, a lack of facility for development of social life and a suburban sprawl', Blackheath's status as a cohesive 'village' community meant that it should be a model for urban development. 'Surely,' the BMAG argued, 'the aim of long term social planning should be to develop the rest of the London suburbs in a manner calculated to give them the advantages of Blackheath, rather than to reduce Blackheath to the level of the rest'.<sup>92</sup> Blackheath's 'village' character was something 'to be encouraged and not destroyed', and if London was to survive 'as a place to live in as well as work in' it had to be saved from the motorway.<sup>93</sup>

If Blackheath was to survive, one option for the campaigners there was for Ringway 1 to run through a deep tunnel under the village. This had been put forward as a potential solution almost as soon as the Ringways proposal had surfaced, and it formed a key part of the Blackheath objectors' case during the inquiry.<sup>94</sup> It also received the backing of Buchanan, who was asked by the GLC to produce a report on how Ringway 1 should be incorporated into the Blackheath area, and concluded that a tunnel would be the only way to preserve its character.<sup>95</sup> Ultimately, however, the Blackheath tunnel option was viewed as a last resort, as the campaigners were united with other objectors in the aim of preventing the Ringways from being built

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<sup>91</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/09/004 Numbered Objections, Objection 371

<sup>92</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Memorandum on Proposals for the Dover Radial Route through Blackheath and District, undated

<sup>93</sup> LEW: S/5/3/40 A/01/1/1/2, Proof of Evidence of the Blackheath Society to Greater London Development Plan Inquiry, 16 August 1971; LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Campaign leaflet, undated

<sup>94</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Memorandum on Proposals for the Dover Radial Route through Blackheath and District, undated

<sup>95</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/447 Background Papers, Greenwich and Blackheath Study, April 1971, p. 62

altogether. Rather than building motorways, it was argued that the GLC should pursue a different strategy. It was the contention of the objectors that, in addition to all the physical and social devastation that they would bring to the areas through which they passed, the Ringways would not even achieve their primary aim of reducing London's congestion. To the contrary, the main impact of the new roads would be to encourage more people to make more journeys by car, leading eventually to greater congestion.<sup>96</sup>

As part of their case, the LMAG, together with the London Transport and Amenities Association, hired J. Michael Thomson, a research fellow in transport at the London School of Economics, to examine the GLC's proposals. Thomson and his team concluded that 'the motorways would generate a volume of traffic some 70 to 100 per cent greater than would materialise otherwise'.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, while the GLC may have been sincere in its desire to improve London's environment, the centrality of urban motorways to the development plan demonstrated that the Council's priorities were all wrong. Thomson argued that the economic and social costs of 'providing roads and parking space for everyone to use cars for almost all journeys' were so great that 'one is compelled to conclude it is impossible'. To a significant degree, Thomson's study anticipated the measures that would be implemented in London in subsequent decades. Instead of building the Ringways and attempting to cater for rising car use, the answer was to discourage people from driving in London, and to find a means 'to persuade them into choosing public transport for some of their journeys'.<sup>98</sup> Much of the objectors' case, therefore, rested on arguing that the GLC should invest in public transport instead of motorways. The campaign group Women

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<sup>96</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/152 Transcripts of Proceedings, 150th Day, 22 September 1971, p. 5

<sup>97</sup> J. Michael Thomson, *Motorways in London: Report of a Working Party for the London Amenity and Transport Association* (London, 1969), pp. 164-65

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18

on the Move, for example, described the Ringways as ‘extravagant’, and called for ‘proposals for implementing a policy of public transport and for restraining private car trips’.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Greenwich and Croydon councils argued that the roads would not reduce congestion, and that the money should instead be spent on ‘greatly improved and convenient public transport networks’.<sup>100</sup>

In examining the case made against the GLDP, it is important not to overlook whom the objectors were, and how this may have influenced the arguments used in opposition to the motorways. Davis argues that the dispute over the GLDP entailed a clash between one ‘feature of 1960s affluence’ – rising private car ownership – and another in rising owner-occupation of housing. Owing to the threat posed by the motorways to housing and the character of local environments, London’s growing ranks of owner-occupiers mobilised to oppose the GLC’s plan. The campaign against the Ringways – which succeeded in gaining 100,000 votes in the 1969 GLC elections under the banner of ‘Homes Before Roads’ – was a ‘middle class resistance movement’ through which a wide circle of ‘informed white-collar laymen’ challenged the designs of the planners.<sup>101</sup> Where in the past the GLDP might have proceeded without hindrance, by the end of the 1960s affluence and gentrification had ensured that ‘inner London no longer consisted exclusively of a mute and malleable working class’.<sup>102</sup> Davis’s argument is a convincing one, and it is borne out by examination of the archival evidence. It is surely no coincidence that two of the most vocal campaigns against the Plan originated in two of London’s most affluent and desirable suburbs, Hampstead and Blackheath, and it is significant that the two campaign

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<sup>99</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/536 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/82, Women on the Move, undated, pp. 1-2

<sup>100</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/530 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/15, London Boroughs of Croydon and Greenwich, January 1971, p. 4

<sup>101</sup> Davis, ‘Simple solutions’, pp. 256-59

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270

groups led the way in forming the LMAG. Both the Hampstead and Blackheath groups were supported by those with the financial and cultural capital necessary for mounting an effective campaign against the motorways. The leader of the BMAG was the local MP Roland Moyle and the chair of its first meeting was the Labour MP and future Prime Minister James Callaghan.<sup>103</sup> The chair of the LMAG was the Labour MP Douglas Jay, and its membership included thirteen other MPs, as well as 65 local residents' associations and conservation groups.<sup>104</sup> The campaigners' political connections ensured that its case was heard in Whitehall, with deputations received by both the Minister of Transport and the Minister for Planning and Land.<sup>105</sup> There can be little doubt that the campaign against the Ringways had its roots in London's affluent middle class, and the areas from which many of the objections originated back up Davis's observation regarding owner-occupation.

Nevertheless, the campaign's middle-class status need not diminish its importance as an appeal for the protection of the urban environment. While working-class voices may have been largely absent, and many objectors may have been motivated, at least in part, by 'not-in-my-back-yard' concerns, it is still significant for the emergence of environmental politics that such a major battle arose around the Ringways plan. The conception of city life put forward by the objectors to the GLDP diverged dramatically from the vision put forward by the GLC. Although both sides took as their starting point the idea that rising car ownership posed a major threat to the quality of life in cities, the objectors argued that the urban environment could not possibly be improved by the construction of major motorways. Whereas the GLC, taking inspiration from Buchanan, argued that wholesale redevelopment offered a

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<sup>103</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Dover Radial Route Background Information, undated

<sup>104</sup> LMA: GLC/TD/GLDP/08/531 Proofs of Evidence, Proof E12/20, London Amenity and Transport Association and London Motorway Action Group, January 1971, p. iii

<sup>105</sup> LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Press release, undated; LEW: S/5/3/39 A/01/1/1/1, Hampstead Motorway Action Group Newsletter, 31 December 1968



technological fix to the environmental problems faced by the city, the anti-motorways campaigners contended that both the tangible and intangible qualities of the urban environment would be ill served by the modernist Ringways project. Not only would residents face losing their homes and green spaces, and face an even greater menace from noise and fumes, but they would also face being separated from one another by the motorways running through their areas, causing irreparable damage to the life of cohesive communities. For the objectors, whose middle-class status reflected their 'postmaterial' aspirations, the urban environment was not defined simply by its physical features, but also by the social relationships that formed among its inhabitants. The motorways, the objectors, argued, would destroy those relationships and diminish the quality of life, and the Layfield Inquiry was urged to take account of this in its consideration of whether to recommend the approval of the GLC's development plan.

### **The Layfield Report and the demise of the Greater London Development Plan**

Having opened in July 1970, the Greater London Development Plan Inquiry finally closed on 9 May 1972, following 237 days of hearings. With the inquiry proceedings at an end, the responsibility fell to the chair, Frank Layfield, and his panel to consider their recommendations to the Secretary of State for the Environment, who would make the final decision on whether to approve the Plan. The Layfield Report was passed to the Secretary of State, Geoffrey Rippon, on 18 December 1972, and published on 19 February 1973. While Layfield did not recommend the approval of the GLDP in its original form, he did recommend that Rippon should accept the Plan if certain amendments were made by the Council. This would include a version of the Ringways plan. The GLC's proposal for four motorways was deemed to have been excessive, and Layfield argued that 'what is needed can be adequately achieved

by no more than two complete orbitals, an inner and an outer'. It was recommended that Ringway 1 should be built, along with a second motorway on the outskirts of London. If possible, the panel suggested, an alternative route should be found for Ringway 1 that did not pass through Blackheath.<sup>106</sup>

Given that Ringway 1 had been at the heart of many objections to the GLDP, Layfield's recommendations represented a significant defeat for the objectors. However, while he stopped short of advising the scrapping of the motorways, it is clear from Layfield's report that the case made against the Plan shaped his perspective on the future of London's environment. Like both the GLC and the objectors, Layfield started from the position that there was no way of avoiding the challenge posed by traffic in town. Rising affluence was bringing 'the ownership of cars within reach of an ever increasing section of the community', and that trend had shown that 'freedom of movement is seen by a large majority as an attractive feature of modern living'. A minimalist approach to the congestion problem would only lead to a further decline in conditions, and positive action was needed 'if London is to remain tolerable as a living place and viable as a work place'.<sup>107</sup>

Layfield agreed with the GLC that road building had to form part of the solution, but he did not agree that the Council had paid sufficient attention to the potential environmental impact of the Ringways. He noted that the largest volume of criticism at the inquiry had concerned the environmental implications of the GLC's proposals, and pointed out that, while there was growing recognition within the Council that 'a transport plan should be an integrated strategy for movement and for the improvement of the environment', this had not been apparent when the GLDP was submitted in 1969. The original Plan had been heavily weighted towards roads as the

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<sup>106</sup> DOE, *GLDP Inquiry Report*, pp. 416, 420

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 252-53, 257

solution, and Layfield recommended that the Plan should be strengthened in regards to ‘the improvement of public transport and the improvement of the environment’.<sup>108</sup> While arguing that the GLC should pay greater attention to public transport, Layfield stopped short recommending the introduction of restrictions on the flow of traffic within London, on the grounds that ‘the degree of restraint needed would be draconian, would be unacceptable to the public and would damage the economic life of London’.<sup>109</sup> New roads did need to be built, and movement could not be restricted, but that did not mean that London had to be sacrificed to the car. For Layfield, the motorways would only be acceptable because he believed that they offered a solution to the environmental problems caused by traffic congestion. ‘Movement,’ he wrote, ‘is a means to an end, not an end in itself.’ The creation of ‘reasonable conditions of movement must be geared to tolerable conditions of living’. If the quality of life in London was not placed at the forefront of the development plan, Layfield concluded, ‘the urban environment [would] be turned into a motorised hell’.<sup>110</sup>

Layfield also drew particular attention to the problem of pollution. While the provisions of the 1956 Clean Air Act (see chapter three) and successive legislation had ‘almost removed pollution from domestic heating in London’, the growth of the traffic problem meant that Londoners faced an increasing risk from ‘carbon monoxide, lead and other components of fumes from vehicles’. Layfield noted that concerns around air pollution had been voiced frequently by objectors over the course of the GLDP inquiry, and contrasted such concerns with the GLC’s contention that vehicle fumes did not present a significant threat to human health. The final report did not make specific recommendations on how the mitigation of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., pp. 272, 275-77

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., pp. 645-46

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 494-95

pollution should be incorporated into a revised GLDP, but it did argue that the GLC could do more, and it advised the Secretary of State to take note of concerns around air pollution in considering whether to give final approval to the Ringways plan.<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately, Layfield's recommendations were to prove moot. Although the Secretary of State accepted the advice given to him in the Layfield Report, with its proposal for two orbital motorways, the victory of the Labour Party in the 1973 GLC elections coincided with the demise of the Ringways idea. The GLDP had been devised under a Labour-led GLC in the mid-1960s, and the party had not opposed it while it was taken forward under the Conservatives after 1967, but by 1973 Labour had lost its enthusiasm for the Plan. Davis argues that this was a reflection of the widespread unpopularity of the proposals – the GLDP didn't die because Labour won control of the GLC, but rather because 'its over-ambition had been exposed during the public scrutiny process'. The Layfield Inquiry had 'magnified every flaw in the Plan', and sapped the political will to proceed with its implementation. It was a protracted process, but in the end the objectors emerged victorious. In 1976 a version of the GLDP without the motorways received ministerial approval, and remained as part of GLC planning policy until the Council's abolition in 1986.<sup>112</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although it ultimately came to nothing, the GLDP provides a rich case study through which to examine the development of environmental politics during the 1960s and the early 1970s. As is also discussed in chapter five, in the early 1960s, traffic congestion was identified as one of the most significant challenges facing Britain's towns and cities, and as planners and politicians searched for a solution, the

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., pp. 233, 243-46, 385, 637

<sup>112</sup> Davis, 'Simple solutions', pp. 269-70

problem came to be conceptualised as ‘environmental’. In his high-profile report, Colin Buchanan outlined the scale of the challenge, and framed it in terms of its impact on the urban environment, asking what constituted a ‘good’ environment and whether such an environment could be reconciled with the rapid and seemingly unceasing growth in volumes of motor traffic. In one sense this was conservationist, in that it sought to conserve what was considered valuable to British urban life, but the solutions that Buchanan proposed were modernist and radical. Motorways, which had been the source of excitement and wonder when they had first been built between cities in the 1950s, were offered as a means for fixing the urban environment, but their construction promised to transform much that was recognisable about Britain’s towns and cities.

At the heart of the GLDP was a proposal to solve London’s traffic problem using the model put forward by Buchanan. From our present vantage point, it seems utterly unsurprising that a plan to build four eight-lane motorways in London would meet significant opposition, but what is striking about the history of the Ringways is that they were presented as an *environmental* solution. The GLC emphasised that the GLDP would enhance an urban environment that had been rendered unsatisfactory by the coming of the motor car, while their opponents argued that London’s environment would be devastated by the construction of the motorways. That disagreement led to the largest public inquiry in Britain to date, and the ‘environment’ became the battleground on which that inquiry was fought.

It should be noted that, at this stage, the concept of the ‘environment’ was loosely defined. Broadly, it referred to the surroundings within which people lived, both urban and rural, but the common thread that bound the various conceptions was the emphasis on ‘quality of life’. For both the supporters and the opponents of the

GLDP, the issue was 'environmental' because the Ringways would either enhance or diminish the quality of life in London. Similarly, as was discussed in chapter five, the Department of the Environment was so named because the policy areas with which it was concerned were seen to relate to the quality of life. For political actors in the post-war era, the enhancement of the quality of life continued to involve the securing of basic conditions of sanitation and housing, but it also entailed the provision of surroundings in which people could enjoy the benefits of affluence. In this respect, there is continuity across the central chapters of this thesis. In the inter-war period, it was argued that National Parks and the preservation of the countryside would have health benefits for the urban population, but the policy was also presented as one that could contribute to a rising standard of living for workers enjoying access to greater leisure time. In the post-war decades, the main political parties became increasingly attentive to the desire for amenable surroundings among an increasingly affluent population, and the environment came to be considered to have growing electoral saliency. It was in this context that the battle was fought over the London motorways.

In London, the GLC pointed out that the motorways would provide relief from the accidents and fumes associated with traffic, but also stressed that they would enhance the beauty and tranquillity of the city. The British Roads Federation, meanwhile, proposed that mobility was essential to urban life, and argued that a 'good' environment had to accommodate the freedom of the individual to drive a car within the city. The objectors, while arguing that the accidents and fumes would become worse, also emphasised the importance of social interaction to the urban environment, and expressed concern that communities would be severed by the motorways. On the whole, the environmental vision of the objectors was not one

that involved outright opposition to economic growth and technological progress, as represented in the GLDP by mass car ownership and motorway construction. In line with many of the arguments examined in this thesis, the objectors' case sought to reconcile development and conservation, and envisaged a role for governance, both national and local, in achieving the ideal balance. In spite of the timing, opposition was not driven by an 'anti-industrial' spirit, not by the radicalism that Meredith Veldman argues shaped environmental politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>113</sup>

Together with the formation of the Department of the Environment, the challenge of traffic in towns and the fierce dispute over the GLDP demonstrates how the environment had acquired political resonance in Britain by the early 1970s. Global concerns over pollution played their part, but to a large extent British environmental politics were shaped by domestic anxieties. Affluence had raised expectations around 'quality of life' while, at the same time, key symbols of affluence, particularly the motor car, appeared to threaten the continued rise of living standards. While they were by no means at the top of the political agenda, the securing of a 'good' environment and the enhancement of 'quality of life' were firmly established as responsibilities of government, both national and local, by the early 1970s, and that background should be borne in mind when considering the further rise of environmental politics and environmental activism over subsequent decades.

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<sup>113</sup> Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 3, 304

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion**

It has been the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that the inter-war and post-war periods were crucial to the development of environmental politics in Britain. Whereas much of the existing literature foregrounds social movements and radical critiques of industrial society, this thesis challenges the assumption that environmental politics is a product of 1960s ‘counter-culture’, and argues that greater significance should be attached to developments within mainstream politics between the late 1920s and the early 1970s. During this period, a range of problems of governance were identified as arising from the interaction between society and its surroundings, and by the beginning of the 1970s the concept of the ‘environment’ was established as a unified field of public policy, subject to increasing state regulation in the name of enhancing the ‘quality of life’ of the British population. This was a process that took place with reference to town and country, as debate occurred on how to improve rural and urban conditions, and the term ‘environment’ entered political discourse as a label for both ‘natural’ and built surroundings.

The centrality of both town and country is reflected in the episodes examined in the five central chapters of this thesis. In chapter two, efforts to preserve the countryside in the 1930s and 1940s were clearly linked to the ‘natural’ environment, but the issue exposed tensions between urban and rural interests. National Parks and town and country planning legislation were proposed with the purpose of protecting rural areas from ongoing urban and industrial development, while National Parks were also advanced as a means for providing new recreational spaces for Britain’s urban population. For some campaigners, the latter aim sat uneasily with a wish to shield the rural landscape from the influence of city life. If National Parks offered a means



of temporary escape for the urban population, in chapter three the focus is upon efforts to improve conditions within the city itself. The London smog of 1952 exposed the severity of air pollution resulting from the combustion of coal in both industrial and domestic settings, and highlighted the need for legislative measures to improve the atmosphere in British towns and cities.

Chapter four returns to the rural environment, exploring the tension in the 1950s and early 1960s between the British nuclear power programme and the continuing appeal for the preservation of the countryside. The need to site nuclear power stations in remote locations clashed with the interests of those who wished to protect unspoilt sections of the rural landscape, while divisions opened up between preservationists and locals who desired the economic benefits of industrial development. In chapters five and six, the focus is largely upon urban problems, as both chapters demonstrate how concerns over traffic congestion in towns and cities in the 1960s and early 1970s played a key role in the conceptualisation of the 'environment' as a field of government policy. Use of the term 'environment' became widespread during the 1960s in response to the problem of traffic in towns, and in Greater London in the late 1960s and early 1970s the 'environment' became the ground on which the battle was fought over the construction of an urban motorway network. Chapter five also examines the increasing attention paid in the 1960s to the pollution of the land, air and water, which posed challenges for both 'natural' and built surroundings, and prompted the reorganisation of administrative structures.

### **The extension of state regulation**

In contrast to existing studies, including those by authors such as Bill Luckin and David Matless that downplay 'anti-industrial' radicalism, this thesis places central

government and the British state at the heart of the story.<sup>1</sup> Across the period examined in this thesis, a key feature of the development of environmental politics was the extension of state regulation. As James Vernon argues, an essential characteristic of modernity is the breakdown of traditional power structures, rooted in local and personal relationships, and the growth of new forms of governance to manage problems that arise from the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation.<sup>2</sup> Vernon's work is focused on Britain in the nineteenth century, but the developments that he describes continued during the twentieth century. Throughout this thesis, the environmental problems that are discussed arose from the interaction between a modern, urban, industrial society and its surroundings, and they triggered political debates in which solutions were proposed that required the extension of state governance. As chapter two shows, as concern grew in the inter-war period over the destruction of the countryside, government stepped in to examine the problem, and eventually strengthened state regulation through legislative measures. It is important to recognise the importance of official committees of inquiry in raising the profile of environmental problems. The committees on National Parks chaired by Christopher Addison (1929-31) and Sir Arthur Hobhouse (1945-47) provided thorough investigations of the issue, and set out frameworks for legislative action. The powers of national and local government to protect the countryside from development were extended by Town and Country Planning Acts in 1932, 1943 and 1947, and by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949.

A similar pattern was followed with the problem of air pollution in the 1950s, as government appointed an investigative committee under Sir Hugh Beaver, which recommended significant state action to curb the menace of coal smoke in urban

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<sup>1</sup> David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), p. 25; Bill Luckin, *Questions of Power: Electricity and Environment in Inter-War Britain* (Manchester, 1990), p. 100

<sup>2</sup> James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (London, 2014), pp. 128-29

areas. In 1956, the Conservative government of Anthony Eden passed the Clean Air Act, which gave the state new powers to control the emission of smoke from both industrial and domestic sources. Chapter four examines the historical clash between the imperative of a nuclear power programme and existing legislation designed to control the development of the rural environment. The 1949 National Parks Act presented an obstacle to the plan to construct a nuclear power station in Snowdonia, while the Electricity Acts of 1947 and 1957 ensured that the public inquiries into the siting of atomic installations had to take account of rural ‘amenity’ when considering the suitability of a proposed location. During the 1960s, state regulation developed further. As is discussed in chapter five, concerns over pollution, underlined by the *Torrey Canyon* oil tanker disaster in 1967, prompted a reconsideration of official procedures by Harold Wilson’s Labour government, and in 1969 the Prime Minister established a permanent Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Wilson also amended National Parks legislation to make it a statutory duty for all government departments to factor ‘the desirability of conserving the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside’ into their decision-making processes. At the same time, the difficulties of meeting the challenge of traffic in towns led to significant changes to the machinery of government, culminating in the creation of the Department of the Environment (DOE) by Edward Heath’s Conservative government in 1970. Heath entered office with a commitment to shrinking the size of government, which was a key aim of his 1970 review of Whitehall machinery, yet with the DOE he created the third largest government department, and significantly expanded the state’s role in regulating environmental problems.

It is important to place the extension of environmental governance in the context of inter-war and post-war politics, particularly in terms of the growth of the welfare

state, and the increased willingness of political actors on both the left and the right to apply the machinery of government to the aim of improving the material conditions of the British people. As chapter two makes clear, there is no need to over-emphasise the existence of a political consensus in mid-century Britain, but there is much evidence that the Labour and Conservative parties frequently overlapped in their aims. On National Parks, the two parties differed in their emphasis, with Labour concentrating on the social democratic virtues of public access and the Conservatives on the preservation of the landscape and the protection of rural interests, but there was broad agreement that the power of the state should be used to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The policy overlap between the two parties was exemplified by the shared use of the language of planning. Interest in industrial and economic planning grew during the inter-war period, particularly among organisations of ‘middle opinion’ such as Political and Economic Planning and the Next Five Years Group, and that combined with an intensifying case for the planning of physical development in both urban and rural areas. From the early 1930s, the case for preserving the countryside was presented in terms of town and country planning, and planning law was strengthened first by the wartime coalition, and then by the Labour government of Clement Attlee. While the Conservatives loosened the restrictions upon their return to government in the 1950s, particularly by abolishing development charges in 1954, the party remained broadly committed to the principle that planning was a necessary part of physical development, and that it should involve a degree of regulation by the state at both a national and local level. Over subsequent decades, the field of town and country planning would play an integral role in the development of environmental politics.

Confronted with the problem of air pollution in the 1950s, the Conservative governments of Churchill and Eden proved willing to entertain solutions that necessitated the creation of new forms of state regulation. The existing literature portrays the Conservatives as complacent and reluctant to act in the wake of the 1952 London smog, but, as chapter three argues, there was in fact much attention paid within Whitehall to the effects of coal smoke emissions. The government's approach was underlined by the attitude of the Minister of Housing and Local Government, Harold Macmillan, who displayed scepticism towards the idea of addressing air pollution, while also laying the groundwork for greater regulation. While bemoaning that it was a 'symptom of the Welfare State' that 'everybody expects the Government to solve every problem', Macmillan nevertheless accepted that the political context of the 1950s required the government to act, and he set up the committee under Sir Hugh Beaver that would conduct a detailed investigation and recommend new legislation to control smoke pollution. Although the government's legislation of 1956 was not as far reaching as the measures recommended by the Beaver Committee, it would be incorrect to argue that it amounted to a sell-out to industrial interests. The Clean Air Act represented a significant extension of environmental governance, and it is worth noting that, in spite of the air pollution debate occurring under a Conservative government, arguments concerning personal freedom received a relatively muted hearing compared with arguments in favour of greater legislative controls.

During the 1960s, as governments struggled to come to terms with the challenge of traffic in towns, planning was consistently presented as the means for shaping an amenable urban environment. Ernest Marples, the Conservative Minister of Transport, spoke in late 1959 of the need to actively create 'a design for living in the

fourth quarter of [the twentieth] century’, and both parties presented the integration of planning and transport policy as the key to addressing the problems posed by mass car ownership. Local and regional authorities were not urged to curb their interventionist tendencies, but rather to produce comprehensive plans for the remaking of Britain’s urban fabric, a strategy that received its fullest expression in the Greater London Development Plan and the proposal to construct four eight-lane motorways in the capital. By the late 1960s the political consensus was that transport and planning could not be handled in isolation, and the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, and the Ministry of Public Building and Works were merged to form the DOE. In setting up the new department, the Heath administration was not simply adjusting the structure of government. The aim, as was acknowledged in departmental documents, was to facilitate ‘the evolution and operation of a broadly conceived environmental policy’, and to enable the development of ‘a coherent set of programmes in the environmental field’. By creating the DOE, the government consciously conceptualised a range of problems – which included countryside preservation, traffic in towns, and the pollution of the air, land and water – as ‘environmental’, and established them as appropriate objects of state regulation.

### **Health, risk and ‘quality of life’**

To a significant degree, the development of environmental politics in Britain occurred in response to the risks that modern life posed to public welfare. In this respect, this thesis is informed by the work of the sociologists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, whom have both argued that the material advantages of industrialisation have been gained alongside increased dangers to human life and welfare. Throughout the period considered by this thesis, political debates took place

against a background of what Beck has described as the ‘hazardous side effects’ of modernity, and public health arguments carried significant weight in determining whether governments were willing to address environmental problems.<sup>3</sup> While the National Parks debate was not conducted solely in terms of health, chapter two shows that the case for the preservation of the rural landscape proved particularly attractive to both Conservative and Labour governments when it was presented as advantageous to public welfare. For the campaigners connected with the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE), the priority was to protect the countryside from development, but at the same time it was argued that National Parks would offer healthy recreational spaces for Britain’s unhealthy urban population. During the 1930s, campaigners realised that government was most responsive when the case for National Parks was linked to public health, and the argument moved to the centre as legislation became a likely prospect in the 1940s.

The risks posed by life in towns and cities were starkly illustrated by the problem of air pollution in the 1950s and, as chapter three shows, there was significant continuity between the clean air debate and the sanitary reforms of the nineteenth century. Enoch Powell drew that comparison in Parliament in 1955, when he argued that there was precedent for government to address a ‘definite evil’ through the passage of reforming legislation. The air pollution problem also underlines the significance of events in exposing weaknesses in governance and prompting the extension of environmental regulation. The London smog of 1952 proved incredibly shocking, first in its visual impact and then, more importantly, in its impact upon the city’s mortality and morbidity rates. By taking the lives of 4,000 or more Londoners, the smog highlighted the risks posed by smoke emissions, and made it incredibly

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 106, 110; Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London, 1992), pp. 12-13, 20

difficult for government to ignore the issue. The role of events is again underlined in chapter five, with the *Torrey Canyon* tanker spill searing the risks of oil pollution on to the public consciousness. Anxiety over the dangers posed by pollution to the land, air and water was central to discussion of the environment within the Labour government in the late 1960s, and undoubtedly played an important role in the decision to establish the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in 1969.

However, while it is certainly significant, risk is not sufficient for explaining the development of environmental politics in twentieth century Britain. Throughout the period explored in this thesis, environmental governance was extended not only in response to tangible threats to public health, but also in response to a broader concern for 'quality of life'. From the inter-war years onwards, and particularly during the post-war decades, a perception developed among political actors that it was no longer sufficient for governments to secure the basic material conditions of the population, as they had, for example, with the sanitary reforms of the nineteenth century. Instead, governance was seen to reach beyond basic welfare and material security, and encompass the provision of greater levels of comfort. This changing role of government connects to growing levels of prosperity during the post-war period, and the political emphasis placed upon the aim of broadening public access to affluence. It is in this regard that Ronald Inglehart's theory of postmaterialism can help to explain the development of environmental politics.<sup>4</sup> As an increasing proportion of the population moved beyond a struggle for basic material wellbeing, expectations shifted, not towards a rejection of material values, but rather towards a desire across all classes for conditions in which to enjoy the benefits of affluence. A broadly prosperous society, with widespread, albeit uneven, access to disposable

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald Inglehart, 'Public support for environmental protection: objective problems and subjective values in 43 societies', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1995), pp. 61-2



income and increasing amounts of leisure time, was seen to demand clean, amenable surroundings in which to pursue both working life and recreation.

Such developments are apparent in chapter two with the debate around town and country planning and National Parks. While a significant case was made for the benefits to public health, the arguments for the preservation of the countryside extended beyond such concerns. Although the inter-war years predate the widespread affluence of the post-war decades, the period was characterised by the increasing democratisation of leisure and the extension of access to holidays with pay, and it was argued that the creation of National Parks would provide all classes with spaces in which to enjoy rural recreation. For the working classes, it was argued that this would prove particularly beneficial, not only in terms of health, but also in terms providing a respite from town life and broadening public appreciation of the British countryside. For more prosperous sections of society, National Parks were also presented in terms of quality of life. Motoring organisations such as the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club argued that Parks would provide opportunities for owners of cars to drive their prized possessions in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

In chapter three, the problem of air pollution relates clearly to risk and public health, but there was nevertheless a broader concern around living standards. Even for those lucky enough to escape the detrimental health effects of pollution, smoke was seen to undermine the quality of life in British towns and cities, and it was argued by the government's Committee on Air Pollution that cleaning up the air would 'secure happier and more healthy living conditions for millions of people'. In chapter four, the problem of where to build nuclear power stations reveals tension between different elements of post-war affluence. While atomic energy was presented by

government as the key to securing the continued growth of prosperity, opponents of individual power stations saw it as clashing with the aim of protecting the British countryside. At the public inquiry at Trawsfynydd, where the power station was to be positioned in the Snowdonia National Park, it was argued by the president of the Youth Hostels Association that National Parks were themselves ‘symbols of a high standard of living’, through which a materially affluent society took steps to restrain its excesses in the interests of the broader quality of life. Environmental protection was presented as integral to the enjoyment of affluence, and as entirely in keeping with the pursuit of prosperity.

In chapters five and six, which focus on the 1960s and the early 1970s, quality of life takes centre stage in driving the extension of environmental governance. When the Heath government created the DOE in 1970, it was the stated aim of the new department to ‘[improve] people’s living conditions’, and the Secretary of State Peter Walker told his staff that the DOE was the department ‘most concerned with improving the quality of living in this country’. When the term ‘environment’ was used in British politics in the period leading up to the creation of the DOE, it was usually with reference to the aim of improving the quality of life. At the centre of that aim lay the challenge of traffic in towns, which was presented, in line with the work of the influential planner Colin Buchanan, as a case of a great symbol of modernity and affluence, the motor car, posing an unprecedented threat to the fabric of urban life. With the Greater London Development Plan, the Greater London Council (GLC) proposed that the construction of a network of motorways could save and improve the quality of life in the city, while opponents of the Plan argued that the roads would serve only to accelerate its destruction. For both sides, the aim was to secure the quality of life, and that aim was to be achieved by shaping a ‘good’

urban environment. The growing political saliency of quality of life was summed up by the GLC at the public inquiry, when it noted that ‘a general revolution of expectations’ had taken place in the post-war period, whereby higher living standards had ‘widened the horizons for the vast majority’. This was reflected at the national level by the creation of the DOE, through which it was acknowledged that the parameters of governance had expanded beyond the provision of basic levels of public health to involve the promotion of greater standards of living. The quality of the ‘environment’, which was seen to encompass both rural and urban surroundings, was considered to be central to the enjoyment of everyday life.

### **Political actors, NGOs and public opinion**

The increasing political saliency of ‘quality of life’ points to the importance of political actors in the development of environmental governance. Over the course of the inter-war and post-war periods, both the Conservative and Labour parties came to acknowledge that there was political value in supporting environmental policies. This occurred in relation to National Parks, when both parties committed to the policy in the 1940s, and air pollution, when the Conservative government, despite some reservations, realised that it was in its political interests to pass clean air legislation. However, it was during the 1960s that the Labour and Conservative parties truly began to speak the political language of the environment, and by the end of the decade environmental policies were viewed as having vote-winning potential. The word ‘environment’ appeared in both party manifestoes in 1970, and the release by the outgoing Labour government of a White Paper on pollution was viewed in the press as a transparent attempt at presenting its environmental credentials to the electorate. In July 1970, the new Conservative government under Edward Heath became the first to mention the environment in the Queen’s Speech.

The rise of the environment up the party political agenda reflected the interest of a number of influential individual actors. Richard Crossman took a keen interest in the problems of the urban environment during his time as Minister of Housing and Local Government, while Wayland Young, Lord Kennet, as a junior minister in the same department, played a key role in advancing concern around pollution. There was also notable interest from Anthony Greenwood, Edward Short, Michael Stewart and, perhaps most importantly, Anthony Crosland, whose work as Secretary of State for Local Government and Regional Planning laid the groundwork for the creation of the DOE. There was also personal interest from the Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, who spoke on a number of occasions of the growing importance of the environment, describing it in 1969 as ‘moving to the centre of the political stage’. The Wilson governments deserve to be viewed as significant in the development of environmental politics in Britain, but credit is also due to Heath, who in 1970 described environmental governance as ‘among the highest priorities of the seventies’.

It is important to note that there was also political pressure from beyond the parliamentary frontbenches. Throughout the inter-war and post-war periods, backbench MPs played an influential role in promoting environmental policies. In the early 1930s, the Conservative MP Edward Hilton Young was central to the extension of planning regulations to the countryside, and received support from a number of colleagues, including his fellow Conservative John Buchan, Labour’s Philip Noel-Baker and the Liberal Herbert Samuel. For issues that did not sit at the very top of the political agenda, the work of backbenchers ensured that government could not simply ignore them. That was certainly the case with air pollution, when MPs such as Tom Driberg, Norman Dodds and Marcus Lipton asked frequent

questions following the 1952 London smog. The private member's bill of the Conservative MP Gerald Nabarro was crucial in prompting the government to accelerate the presentation of its own Clean Air Bill, and Nabarro received enthusiastic support from MPs on both sides of the Commons.

While elected politicians played a key role, it is also important to acknowledge the contribution of Whitehall officials, who were integral to the shaping of environmental policies across the period. Following the smog of 1952, civil servants within the Ministry of Health quickly began to investigate, and crucially brought expert medical knowledge to bear in establishing the impact of the incident on London's mortality and morbidity rates. Similarly, as concern grew over numerous forms of pollution during the 1960s, civil servants advised the government on how best to respond. An investigation into departmental responsibilities was led by the government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Solly Zuckerman, leading eventually to the establishment of a central coordinating unit staffed by scientists. Government also received expert guidance from specialists appointed to investigate particular environmental problems. The architect and conservationist John Dower was invited to produce a report on National Parks during the Second World War, while in the 1950s the Beaver Committee was comprised of experts from a range of fields connected to the problem of air pollution. In the early 1960s, Colin Buchanan was appointed by the Ministry of Transport to apply his technical expertise to the challenge of traffic congestion in towns and cities, and his recommendations proved influential in shaping changes to the machinery of government later in the decade. Such investigations reflect the growth in complexity of governance during the twentieth century, and underline how the environment entered British politics through formal governmental structures. In a nation committed, as authors such as

David Edgerton and Jim Tomlinson argue, to developing its economic and technological capacity, the state applied scientific and technical expertise in an effort to solve the environmental challenges posed by modernity.<sup>5</sup>

Environmental policies were also promoted throughout the period by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Nabarro received support in preparing his Clean Air Bill from the National Smoke Abatement Society, an organisation that had campaigned around the issue of air pollution since the late nineteenth century. As chapter two shows, the CPRE played a significant role in promoting the protection of the countryside, and it was joined by a range of outdoor and conservationist organisations in campaigning for the introduction of National Parks. However, while NGOs did play a role, this thesis does not overstate their contribution, nor does it emphasise the importance of an ‘environmental movement’ in the development of environmental politics in Britain. NGOs did not provide the only voices in the various debates, and in some key instances it is difficult to attribute much influence to them at all – for example, the response of government to the challenge of traffic in towns, and the eventual creation of the DOE, was not prompted by pressure from campaigning organisations. In this respect, this thesis diverges from the existing literature, including works that support its overall case. For example, Matless on inter-war preservationism and Peter Thorsheim on clean air both emphasise the centrality of campaigners, whereas this thesis argues that greater significance should be attributed to the state and formal political actors.<sup>6</sup>

One important contribution that NGOs did make was to add to a perception within government that there was public demand for action to address environmental

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<sup>5</sup> David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (2nd ed. London, 2013), pp. 132-33, 171; Jim Tomlinson, *The Politics of Decline: Understanding Post-War Britain* (Harlow, 2000), p. 25

<sup>6</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, p. 14; Peter Thorsheim, *Inventing Pollution: Coal, Smoke and Culture in Britain since 1800* (Ohio, 2006), p. 165

problems. During the 1930s and 1940s, campaigners linked to the CPRE pushed the notion that there was widespread interest in National Parks, and this was internalised by government departments, which argued that they were implementing the policy in response to public demand. In the post-war period, a key role was played by media coverage of environmental problems. In chapter three, the belief within government that public opinion demanded air pollution measures was fuelled by press attention to the 1952 smog and its aftermath, while during the 1960s media reports on growing concern over pollution were reflected in increased government attention to the problem. It is difficult to judge where the public stood on environmental issues during the inter-war and post-war periods. There are snapshots in this thesis, particularly with the public inquiries on nuclear power stations and the London motorways, but they provide an inconclusive picture. Members of the public came down on both sides of the arguments, with some supporting major infrastructure projects and others taking the preservationist perspective. However, the importance of public opinion lies less in where it actually stood, and more in how it was perceived by political actors. Throughout the period explored in this thesis, a perception developed within government that there was public concern over environmental problems, and this made an important contribution to the rising political saliency of the environment, and to the extension of environmental governance. To a large extent, this perception had its roots in ideas of what the public desired in an age of affluence, but it also stemmed from how government gauged the popular response to particular environmental events.

### **Rationalising development**

Ultimately, the problems behind the growth of environmental governance in inter-war and post-war Britain arose as unwanted side effects of ongoing economic

development. The destruction of the rural landscape, urban traffic congestion, and the pollution of the air, land and water all had their roots in industrialisation, urbanisation and rising economic prosperity. However, it is crucial to note that environmental politics did not take shape as a backlash against technological modernity – the arguments advanced in the debates examined in this thesis were on the whole not radical, and the outcomes did not represent major departures from political norms. The dominant tone of the debates was neatly captured in the words of the conservationist Max Nicholson at the 1958 Dungeness nuclear power inquiry. Nicholson argued that many people in Britain possessed a ‘split personality’, desiring ‘economic development and a higher standard of living’, while also wishing for ‘the intangible values of our civilisation to be upheld and preserved’.

Across the period explored in this thesis, the objective of environmental governance was to establish an accommodation between continuing economic development and the preservation and enhancement of society’s surroundings in both town and country. When the Conservative MP Edward Hilton Young proposed his Rural Amenities Bill in the early 1930s, he argued that there was no reason why the preservation of the countryside had to interfere with industrial activity and involve the arresting of development. The key was to strike a balance, an aim that Herbert Samuel summed up as ‘the rationalisation of development’. That approach mirrors what Matless describes as the ‘planner-preservationism’ of the CPRE, which ‘entailed not a conservative protection of the old against the new’, but rather an attempt to reconcile progress and preservation.<sup>7</sup> It is argued in this thesis that this philosophy was present not only in campaigning organisations, but also in the approach of the state and leading policymakers. It can be identified throughout the cases examined in the central chapters, with environmental policies always representing an attempt to

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<sup>7</sup> Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, pp. 14, 25



offset the unwanted side effects of modernity, while retaining its perceived benefits. The discipline of town and country planning exemplifies this aim, as policies were adopted in the hope of finding a compromise between the imperatives of development and the provision of amenable urban and rural environments. In the 1930s and 1940s, physical planning gained a foothold in British policymaking, both as a means for reconstructing urban spaces and as a method for preventing the destruction of the countryside. As chapters five and six show, during the 1960s and early 1970s planners were tasked with devising a means by which the reality of mass car ownership could be squared with the maintenance of desirable living conditions in Britain's towns and cities.

Often, even the keenest advocates of environmental protection emphasised the importance of economic development. As we have seen, parliamentary proponents of rural protection in the 1930s framed their ideas in terms of the 'rationalisation of development', and this was reflected in the approach of organised campaigners. Members of the CPRE-affiliated Standing Committee on National Parks were always eager to point out that they were neither 'cranks' nor 'faddists', and a common assertion was that National Parks could not be allowed to become 'museum pieces' – rural industries such as agriculture had to be allowed to continue, and campaigners were not even prepared to declare their total opposition to heavier forms of industrial development, if the national interest would be served by it. During the nuclear power inquiries, explored in chapter four, opponents of individual power stations were generally keen to stress that they supported the British pursuit of atomic energy, and were only opposed to the construction of facilities at specific locations. Similarly, in chapter six, opponents of the London motorways did not generally approach the issue from a position of outright opposition to mass car

ownership and urban road building. There was acknowledgement that the urban environment was subject to constant evolution, and that rising affluence and the demand for greater mobility were not trends that could be halted.

While it is a central contention of this thesis that significant forms of environmental governance developed in Britain during the inter-war and post-war periods, it is important to recognise that environmental politics always had their limits. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, governments had become attentive to environmental problems, but their willingness to act was always constrained by dominant political priorities. All governments of the period prioritised economic growth and the prosperity of the electorate, and throughout this thesis it can be seen that environmental policies were most likely to be pursued when they aligned with those aims. The problem of air pollution, discussed in chapter three, provides a clear example. The emission of smoke posed a direct threat to public health, which spurred government to act, but it was also shown by the Committee on Air Pollution to have detrimental economic effects. By presenting government with the opportunity to save as much as £250 million per year, as well as the means for preserving coal stocks at a time of supply shortages, the Committee framed clean air legislation as both a socially and economically attractive measure. The environmental policies of the 1960s and early 1970s can also be viewed in this light. In a period of increasing public affluence, quality of life was viewed as a potential electoral issue, and the measures of the late 1960s, leading up to the creation of the DOE in 1970, were intended to demonstrate the government's commitment to rising living standards. Economic growth would continue to be pursued, but it would go together with improvements to the environment in the name of quality of life. Environmental governance would enhance, rather than hinder, the experience of affluence.

However, in situations in which dominant political priorities did not converge with the aim of preserving and enhancing social surroundings, environmental policy invariably lost out. The clearest example of this comes in chapter four, with the failure of objectors to prevent the construction of nuclear power stations. The government's commitment to atomic energy, which it presented as a great technological leap and a vital economic step, made it unlikely that opponents of individual stations would win their battles. Ultimately, government was willing to disregard amenities and National Parks legislation in order to drive forward its nuclear power programme. Furthermore, the nuclear power inquiries revealed that local populations were not united in their opposition to the stations. Particularly in North Wales, where unemployment and population decline were endemic problems, many locals spoke out in support of nuclear power, with their desire for technological progress and economic development far outweighing their interest in preserving the rural environment. In chapter six, opponents of the London motorways faced similar obstacles. Road building may have produced huge numbers of objections, but it reflected the reality that the majority of people either owned cars or desired to acquire them. While the London motorways plan did eventually collapse, it did not represent a total defeat for the idea of accommodating motor transport in towns and cities. National and regional governments were only ever willing to go so far to satisfy environmental concerns.

### **Rethinking environmental politics**

This thesis began by defining 'environmental politics' as *the debate over the impact of human society on the 'natural' and built environment, and the attempt to manage that impact through public policy*. Over the course of its five central chapters, the thesis has shown that such a debate occurred in Britain throughout the inter-war and post-war periods,

and demonstrated that the 'environment' had acquired a significant position in mainstream British policymaking by the early 1970s. The concept of the 'environment' was loosely defined. Broadly it referred to both urban and rural surroundings, and within political circles it was used with reference to the aim of improving those surroundings through governance. However, as chapter six shows, it was a fluid and contested term. For those that objected to motorways in London, a 'good environment' had to refer to urban surroundings freed from roads and motor traffic, whereas for the GLC it could refer to surroundings in which motorways played an integral role. For the British Roads Federation, a 'good environment' was actually defined by the freedom to drive a car without hindrance. Nevertheless, while it may have been loosely defined, the concept came to carry significant political weight. During the post-war decades, the problems examined in this thesis became characterised as 'environmental', and with the creation of the DOE in 1970 environmental governance was enshrined in the structure of Whitehall. The 'environment' had not become a dominant political priority, but governments and political parties had become attentive to it, particularly in cases where it crossed over with concern for 'quality of life', and the developments explored in this thesis created a framework for the continued rise of environmental politics beyond the early 1970s.

It is hoped that this thesis contributes to the understanding of environmental politics in Britain in a number of ways. It is clear that the developments of the inter-war and post-war periods did not represent a profound and radical shift in political values. With this in mind, it is useful to refer again to the work of Michael Bess on post-war France, in which he characterises developments in that country as a 'shallow greening'.<sup>8</sup> If a 'greening' can be said to have taken place in post-war Britain, it

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960-2000* (Chicago, 2003), p. 4

should be characterised as equally shallow. The circumstances of modernity led to increased public and political concern for the condition of urban and rural surroundings, but at no stage was there widespread rejection of the pursuit of economic and technological development. The environment took shape as a field of policy in the context of a national commitment to Britain's status as a technological innovator and a global economic power. Any Romantic backlash against industrialism, as discussed in the work of authors such as Martin Wiener and Meredith Veldman, should be seen as forming part of a minority perspective, with limited influence on mainstream politics.<sup>9</sup> This thesis does not agree that an 'anti-industrial' spirit played a significant role in the development of environmental politics in Britain. In much of the existing literature, particularly in the social sciences, there is significant emphasis placed upon the role of an 'environmental movement', radical in character, which is seen to have been integral in bringing about an 'environmental revolution' by the early 1970s. This thesis downplays the role of 'social movements', and demonstrates the importance of examining events in the decades before 1970. The development of environmental politics in Britain was a long-term process, and it was to a great extent the result of the introduction of new forms of regulation by mainstream political actors, who applied the powers of the state to the challenges posed by modernity. Radical 'ecocentric' activism, which Andrew Dobson sees as representing an entirely new political ideology, made a negligible contribution to the creation of the political framework that was in place in Britain by the early 1970s.<sup>10</sup> This thesis also underlines the importance of national contexts. Those authors, such as John McCormick and Joachim Radkau, that have portrayed the development of environmental politics and environmental activism as

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<sup>9</sup> Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 207, 244; Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (2nd ed. Cambridge, 2004), pp. ix, xv-xvi, 6, 9-10

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought* (4th ed. London, 2007), pp. 15, 103, 189

a 'revolution' have tended to take a global perspective, leading to the risk of missing the nuances of domestic political circumstances.<sup>11</sup> While the environmental challenges faced by Britain were by no means unique, and the British government did become active in international environmental debates in the 1960s, this thesis shows that environmental governance took shape largely in response to domestic problems, within the constraints of inter-war and post-war British politics.

By taking a national perspective, this thesis can also contribute to the understanding of the wider political history of inter-war and post-war Britain. In seeking to explain the growth of the state and the extension of governance in the twentieth century, it is worth paying attention to the role of environmental problems. While housing was the primary motivation behind the growth in influence of town and country planning in the 1930s and 1940s, the desire to preserve sections of the countryside played a role, and National Parks policy was one component of the cross-party support for planning that emerged during the Second World War. Without overstating the existence of a post-war consensus, environmental policies can be used to highlight the willingness of both the Labour and Conservative parties to extend state intervention. The clean air legislation of the 1950s provides a clear example of how the Conservatives, albeit with a degree of reluctance, felt compelled in the age of the welfare state to strengthen the powers of government in order to solve a social and economic problem. The growth in the post-war era of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, which would evolve into the DOE, the third largest Whitehall department, underlines how environmental challenges helped to drive the expansion of the British state. This thesis can also offer a new perspective on the Labour and Conservative governments of the 1960s and early 1970s, and shifts in the issues

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<sup>11</sup> John McCormick, *The Global Environmental Movement* (2nd ed. London, 1992), p. 47; Joachim Radkau, *The Age of Ecology* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 1, 10, 111

contested by the parties at general elections. While both parties continued to prioritise economic growth, their deployment of the language of the 'environment' and 'quality of life' shows that they were seeking new issues through which to broaden their electoral appeal. The environment was by no means the primary political concern at the beginning of the 1970s, but it deserves to be given greater consideration in histories of the Wilson and Heath governments.

It is also important to acknowledge the limits of this thesis, and identify some areas for further research. As a study of developments at the level of government and mainstream party politics, the thesis does not explore changing cultural conceptions of the 'environment', and it would be valuable to investigate how such conceptions intersected with political change during the inter-war and post-war periods. There is also scope for enquiring more deeply into public opinion on the environment across the period explored in the thesis, although there are difficulties relating to methodology and available sources, and for providing a more detailed examination of political change from the perspective of activists and campaigning organisations. Further research is also needed into the relationship between national and local politics, and the role of local governments in developing and implementing environmental policies. Furthermore, while this thesis touches upon the contribution of technical experts to the discussion of environmental problems and the formulation of policy, there is undoubtedly scope for a more systematic exploration of the role of expert knowledge in shaping the emergence of the environment as a field of governance.

Although this thesis focuses on the period up to the early 1970s, and there is a need for further study of the years that followed, it is nevertheless hoped that the arguments of its five central chapters can inform our understanding of subsequent

events. Environmental politics continued to take shape after 1970, and there were of course important new developments. The 1970s saw the emergence of new, apparently more ‘radical’ environmental organisations, notably Friends of the Earth (FOE) and Greenpeace, which adopted a global perspective on environmental problems and engaged in high-profile direct action in opposition to projects such as nuclear power and road building.<sup>12</sup> From the 1970s, and through into the 1980s and 1990s, there was increased emphasis placed upon the environment as a shared global challenge, as problems such as overpopulation, climate change and the destruction of the ozone layer came to be perceived as posing an unprecedented threat to the stability of the ecosystem.<sup>13</sup> As Glen O’Hara notes, enthusiasm for planning waned during the 1970s, not only in the field of comprehensive economic and social planning, but also in terms of the physical redevelopment of urban centres.<sup>14</sup> There was a backlash against the urban planning of the post-war years, and the demise of the Greater London Development Plan, examined in chapter six, was characteristic of the mood of the post-1960s period.

However, while changes did occur after 1970, there was also significant continuity with the developments of the inter-war and post-war periods. Planning fell out of favour, but it left a legacy in environmental politics. It was well established that the securing of amenable surroundings in town and country was a responsibility of government and, while transport was turned back into a separate ministry in 1976, an

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Rootes, ‘Britain’, in Christopher Rootes (ed.), *Environmental Protest in Western Europe* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 21, 52; Robert Lamb, *Promising the Earth* (London, 1996), p. 84; Derek Wall, *Earth First! and the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (London, 1999), p. 30

<sup>13</sup> John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (London, 2000), p. 339; On the British government and climate change, see John Agar, “‘Future Forecast – Changeable and Probably Getting Worse’: The UK government’s early response to anthropogenic climate change”, *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 26, no. 4 (2015), pp. 602-28

<sup>14</sup> Glen O’Hara, *From Dreams to Disillusionment: Economic and Social Planning in 1960s Britain* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 165, 211-12



environmental department continued to form part of the machinery of Whitehall.<sup>15</sup> Wholesale redevelopment was no longer popular as a method for addressing the challenges of the urban environment, but solutions continued to be sought to the problem of traffic in towns. In London, motorways were rejected, and policy eventually turned to focus upon congestion charging and investment in the transport infrastructure, both of which were solutions put forward by objectors at the Greater London Development Plan inquiry.

There has also been continuity in the diplomatic arena. As is noted in chapter five, the British government was involved in international discussions on environmental problems during the 1960s, and there was significant activity within the Foreign Office in the lead up to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. It is also necessary to ask just how influential new forms of environmental activism really have been in the years since the early 1970s. As Matthew Hilton et al show in their study of British NGOs, the supposedly ‘radical’ organisations such as Greenpeace and FOE underwent significant professionalisation and institutionalisation during the 1980s and 1990s, and while they did engage in forms of direct action, the focus of their activity was upon the lobbying of central and local government.<sup>16</sup> While this activity was on a larger scale, and was more professional and better funded, it is legitimate to ask how different it really was from the lobbying carried out by the CPRE in the 1930s and 1940s in support of National Parks, or the work of a range of conservationist organisations that opposed the construction of nuclear power stations in the 1950s and early 1960s. Furthermore, as has been noted in this thesis, any claims for environmentalism to represent a major mass social movement must include the membership and supporter figures of

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<sup>15</sup> Mike Robinson, *The Greening of British Party Politics* (Manchester, 1992), p. 11

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas Crowson and Jean-François Mouhot, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 102-3

‘moderate’ groups such as the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, whose emergence long pre-dates the 1970s.

Since 1970, economic development has continued to be the dominant political priority. As Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton note, affluence did not go away, even amid the economic difficulties of the 1970s, and much of the British population continued to experience rising living standards and greater access to consumer goods.<sup>17</sup> While growth has been challenged by radical greens, and development projects have faced organised protest, it would be difficult to argue that there has been a major shift in values within the political and social mainstream. For example, in the mid-1990s radical protests against road building, most famously on the site of the proposed Newbury bypass, gained significant media attention, but they did not, on the whole, achieve their aim of preventing construction.<sup>18</sup> More recently, industrial and political support for shale gas exploration has led to debate on whether ‘fracking’ ought to be permitted within National Park areas. There are clear echoes of the nuclear power inquiries discussed in chapter four, as British energy requirements are weighed against the statutory protections afforded to areas of natural beauty. As with nuclear power, economic imperatives appear likely to win the day – in December 2015, MPs voted in favour of allowing gas exploration within protected areas.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the ongoing shortage of housing stock, particularly within the Greater London region, has ignited debate around green belt regulations, pitting the principle of preservation against far more practical considerations. Following the

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, ‘The uses (and abuses) of affluence’, in Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton (eds.), *An Affluent Society? Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 7

<sup>18</sup> Rootes, ‘Britain’, p. 24

<sup>19</sup> ‘Fracking under National Parks backed by MPs’, *BBC News*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35107203> (accessed 1 April 2016)

2015 general election, the Conservative government has indicated that planning restrictions in the green belt may be relaxed.<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1990s, one of the guiding principles of mainstream environmental politics has been ‘sustainable development’, which describes the aim of balancing economic growth with the protection of the environment.<sup>21</sup> While the idea has of course grown in sophistication, and has taken on a global emphasis, there is a clear line of descent from the debates examined in this thesis. Proponents of rural protection in the inter-war period sought the ‘rationalisation of development’, and physical planning was often practised with the aim of reconciling progress and preservation. Environmental policies emerged before 1970 as attempts to strike a balance between economic development and amenable surroundings, and that has continued to be the purpose of mainstream environmental policy in the decades since 1970. It should also be noted that there has not been a wholesale shift towards an ‘ecocentric’ outlook on society’s relationship with its surroundings. There is, of course, widespread concern for ‘nature’, but for many of the headline environmental problems, such as climate change or air pollution, the dominant outlook continues to be ‘anthropocentric’, with the emphasis placed squarely upon the risks and inconveniences posed to the human population.

To a substantial degree, environmental politics has continued to be conducted within the long-established frameworks of the British system. While a Green Party was established in 1973 (initially as the PEOPLE Party), and has enjoyed some electoral success (it secured 15 per cent of the vote in the 1989 European elections, and it currently has one Westminster MP), it cannot be viewed as anything more than a

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Government plans to relax laws against building on green belt land’, *Independent*, 8 December 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/government-plans-to-relax-laws-against-building-on-green-belt-land-a6764511.html> (accessed 1 April 2016)

<sup>21</sup> McCormick, *Global Environmental Movement*, p. 149

minor party.<sup>22</sup> The success of environmental policy continues to rest upon the willingness of the major parties to drive it forward and, while the parties have become more attentive in recent decades, environmental problems have remained second order political concerns. As this thesis shows, mainstream British politicians began to attach significance to the environment during the 1960s, and subsequent events should be interpreted in that light. Much emphasis is placed in the literature upon Margaret Thatcher's 1988 speech to the Royal Society, in which she acknowledged the existence of global warming, and the need to tackle the problem at a global level.<sup>23</sup> Thatcher described environmental protection as 'one of the great challenges of the late twentieth century', but she was not the first British Prime Minister to speak in such terms.<sup>24</sup> As chapter five shows, both Harold Wilson and Edward Heath spoke of the need to address environmental challenges in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Similarly, the 1990 government White Paper *This Common Inheritance* has been described as the first such document to deal with the environment, yet in reality it was a successor to the Wilson government's 1970 White Paper *The Protection of the Environment: The Fight Against Pollution*.<sup>25</sup> The environment did not suddenly enter British politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There is a longer-term history, and it is important to acknowledge this when considering how the environment has been handled within mainstream politics in recent decades.

It could certainly be argued that British society has become more 'green' since the early 1970s. Undoubtedly, membership of environmental NGOs has risen considerably, and greater attention is now paid to the environment in the media and within mainstream politics. Environmental practices, in particular recycling, have

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<sup>22</sup> Neil Carter, 'Party politicisation of the environment in Britain', *Party Politics*, vol. 12, no. 6 (2006), pp. 748-49, 752-53

<sup>23</sup> Agar, 'Future Forecast', pp. 623-24

<sup>24</sup> David Peterson del Mar, *Environmentalism* (Harlow, 2006), p. 158

<sup>25</sup> Hilton et al, *Politics of Expertise*, p. 101

entered the daily routines of the British public, and climate change has become a key factor in debates over transport and energy use. However, in spite of such developments, it would be difficult to argue that this ‘greening’ has been anything other than shallow. Economic development remains an overriding political priority, and the British public have not, on the whole, abandoned aspirations of pursuing an affluent lifestyle aided by the trappings of technological modernity. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to suggest whether such a shallow green society is inadequate for meeting the environmental challenges of the twenty-first century. Environmental politics may yet succeed, or they may fail, but whatever the outcome, the origins should be traced back beyond the 1970s and, in the case of Britain, particular attention ought to be paid to the events of the inter-war and post-war years.

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